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AN IMPARTIAL AND SUCCINCT

HISTORY

OF THE

RISE, DECLENSION AND REVIVAL

OF THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST;

FROM

THE BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOUR

TO THE

PRESENT TIME.

WITH

FAITHFUL CHARACTERS OF THE PRINCIPAL PERSONAGES, ANCIENT AND MODERN.

BY THE

REV. T. HAWEIS, *LL.B. & M.D.*

Chaplain to the late Countess of Huntingdon, and Rector of All-Saints, Aldwinckle, Northamptonshire.

Second American Edition.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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TO

JOSEPH HARDCASTLE, Esq. *Treasurer*,

AND ALL

THE DIRECTORS AND GOVERNORS

OF THE

MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

BRETHREN,

TO whose patronage can I so properly commend these volumes, as to you, who have encouraged me in the work, and supposed it might conduce to promote the great objects we have in view. We have been earnestly endeavouring to remove the stumbling *blocks* of prejudice and bigotry; to approach each other in nearer bonds of Christian love and union; to awaken a deeper sense of the value of immortal souls redeemed by the same price as our own; and to provoke to more zealous exertions our bretheren of all denominations, to preach the Gospel to every creature.

How that Gospel first spread its rapid conquests in the heathen world---The obstacles surmounted---the noble army of martyrs, who counted not their lives dear unto themselves,---these fill the first pages of this History, and mark the happy commencements of the Kingdom of our LORD. The decline, and dreadful apostacy which afterwards for ages tarnished the glory, and checked the progress of the true Church of CHRIST, are faithfully delineated, with their causes and effects. The resurrection of truth at the Reformation, presents a new series of events, leading to the great consummation, when He, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, shall take to himself his great power and reign, and all flesh shall see the salvation of our God.

The awful times into which we are fallen, have one auspicious symptom attending them, that they have awakened many from the torpor of apathy, and roused considerable bodies to deeper concern about eternal

things. Never since the Reformation commenced, hath there been a more general attention to the poor heathen, or more vigorous efforts to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. What will be the issue, He who hath in his hands the hearts of all men, alone knoweth. Duty is ours—events are His. You, my brethren, have stepped forth in the arduous attempt—may your bow abide in strength! You will see, in these pages, what God hath done; you know in his Book what he will do, and you have every reason to hope, that the time is come when he shall take to himself his great power and reign. And when he will work, none can let it.

To quicken the diligence of the faithful—to strengthen the hands of the feeble—to unite all who love the LORD JESUS CHRIST in sincerity—to soften down all asperities of controversy—to call every faithful soldier around the banner of the Cross, that they may come to the help of the Lord against the mighty powers of darkness—this,

brethren, is your object and mine. It is because I have hope, that this History may have a tendency to promote such desirable objects, I have presumed to commend the following pages to your patronage, and am happy to subscribe myself,

Your affectionate brother,

And fellow helper in the Gospel,

T. HAWEIS.

July 10*th*, 1799.

INTRODUCTION.

THE volumes of Ecclesiastical History, under which our shelves already groan, are immense; and it may require an apology for presuming to increase their number, and adding to the ponderous load. But, whilst the very magnitude of many, deters from perusal, in others the spirit of party has too frequently discoloured the optic glass; *and the bitterness of* bigotry, the interests of exclusive establishments, the prejudices of education, or the mists of heretical pravity, have presented the Church through such a distorted medium, that the fair face of truth has been disfigured by the vizor of antichristian deformity. Instead of a kingdom *not of this world*, whose essential characteristics are "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," we are *disgusted* with contentions for wealth, power, and pre-eminence, issuing in anathemas of body and soul, and terminating in executions the most horrible and inhuman.

To produce a genuine, impartial Ecclesiastical History, is confessedly a work of difficult attempt. *The true Church* can only be described by those who are its *real* members; and not "many wise," in any age, have been counted of that number. In the first days of primitive simplicity, the few who were best able to describe the state of their brethren, were too much engaged in the work of

the ministry, or groaning under the weight of persecution, to transmit to us explicit views of the progress and constitution of the Church of the living God. The writings of the earliest Christians, which have been preserved to our day, are very few; and the materials they afford, in this behalf, scanty and indistinct. Nor are they without suspicion of their authenticity, at least of interpolations, from the unfaithfulness of those by whom they have been copied, and delivered down to us through a succession of ages by persons overwhelmed with superstition, and vindicating the lawfulness of pious fraud.

The first apostolic fathers were plain men; and their letters, admitting their genuineness, addressed to the conscience in practical exhortations, and doctrinal observations, rather than intended to describe the nature of Church government, its administration, or officers. These, therefore, can only be collected from occasional remarks, rather than express definitions. The heathen authors of that day scarcely deign to mention the name of Christians; and when they do so, they discover the most profound ignorance of their real character. Pliny and Tacitus, with the grossest misrepresentations, afford a few of the best and most authentic materials respecting the state and assemblies of the primitive Church.

As far as the sacred records go, we have a clear and distinct view of the principles and progress of Christianity. The doctrines of grace, and the

practice of godliness, fill every page of the Scriptures of Truth. But whoever searches the New Testament impartially and diligently, will find *the form* of Church Government not so clearly stated, nor as explicitly defined; and will perceive that our conclusions must be drawn from collecting and comparing the several hints, which have been dropped in the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles, rather than from any precise declarations. The moment we quit the oracles of God, and descend into the region of uninspired authors, we are struck with the awful difference; we are compelled to examine the genuineness and credibility of their writings; we are bound to compare their doctrines and practices with the revealed word; and to account all that is not found correspondent with the Apostles and Evangelists, but as the opinions and commandments of men. *The mystery of iniquity* began to work in the earliest days, and the corruption of the human heart, even under the very eye of Paul himself, endeavoured to introduce error in doctrine, and pride of pre-eminence.

The earliest of the fathers, Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp, however excellent as men, and honorable as martyrs, afford but moderate specimens to admire as writers, or to edify as divines: zeal and simplicity are their characteristic features. As we advance, and more lettered men exhibit their philosophic reveries, the truth, as it is in Jesus, becomes proportionably debased. Many

of these *fathers* seem to have lost the primitive simplicity which is in Christ, and even in understanding to have become children. Yet do we not cease to admire their noble intrepidity, their readiness to suffer the loss of all things, and even death itself, in the cause of their adorable Master. And all *the great fundamentals* are discoverable in their works: yet mixed, it must be owned, with so great a proportion of error and credulity, such deficiency of true scriptural knowledge, and such fancifulness of interpretation, as to render them very unsafe expositors of evangelical truth: and it requires no inconsiderable degree of industry and impartiality to separate the grain from the chaff which overwhelms it. Truth compels me to give my readers this avowal, I hope it will not be imputed to me as presumptious or offensive.

Many of my brethren, whose names would add weight to their sentiments, have often expressed their wishes, under the impression of the views above suggested, that such a Church History might be composed, as, uniting conciseness with precision, candor with integrity, should represent men and facts as they are, without pressing them into the service of party, or warping them to pre-conceived opinions: and such have been my endeavours. Yet, conscious of the difficulty of the task, it will excite no surprise, though it will probably produce regret, should I incur censure where I covet approbation. The *outward Church* of form and human glory, prominent in the struggles for earthly pomp and emolument, will unavoidably

obtrude itself upon our view; but the great object I mean to pursue, and on which I shall delight to dwell, will be *the Church of the first born, whose names are written in Heaven:* the living members united with the living Head, Jesus Christ, really actuated by his Spirit, and *not of the world, as he is not of the world.* These will be sought for, not exclusively among those denominated *orthodox*, but will be often found amidst the *separatists*, and even with some who have been branded with the opprobrious name of *heretics*. Respecting the different sects which arose, we are often confined to the representations of their adversaries for their opinions and practices, yet even from these much may be collected in their favour: had a genuine detail of their principles and conduct reached us in their own works, which are lost, we should probably have found much more to esteem. Certain it is, that many of them afford as eminent instances of the most rigid virtue and self-denial, and submitted as cheerfully to martyrdom for Christ's name sake, as any of their revilers.

In the pursuit of truth, friends and enemies to Christianity, philosophers and apologists, ancient or modern, will be candidly considered; from Celsus and Porphyry to Gibbon and Priestly; and from Clement, Ignatius, Tertullian and Eusebius, to the excellent Milner; and though with the latter I cannot concur in many of his conclusions, in the main point we are cordially united. It is the very basis on which I build, that "no church can have any real pretensions to

" Christianity, as it is contained in the Scriptures " of Truth, where the foundation is not laid in " the vicarious sacrifice of God incarnate, and the " superstructure raised by the agency of the " Holy Ghost, in powerful access to the conscien- " ces of men, and effectually turning them from " the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that " they may obtain an inheritance among those " who are sanctified through faith, which is in " Jesus Christ." Indeed any other church or Christianity, but this, is not worth a care, much less a contest.

From the morning spread upon the mountains, to the meridian splendor of the Sun of Righteousness, I wish to trace the progress of his Gospel, amidst the storms of persecution, which often obscured his beams, and the fearful defections from the power of godliness, which sometimes seemed to threaten the extinction of his light: and my great object will be to confirm the faith, and to excite the zeal of every true disciple; assured, that whatever conflicts remain to be encountered—whatever eclipses may yet intercept his rays—whatever malignant attempts be made to pluck him from his sphere—he will still shine on serene in his ineffable and undiminished radiance, brighter and stronger unto the perfect day, when his glory *shall be finally revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.* Contemptuous infidelity, proud philosophy, bigotted superstition, atheistical immorality, heretical pravity, and political Christianity, may

unite their powers against the child Jesus, and his everlasting Gospel, but the gates of hell shall never prevail. His persecuted Church will rise, like the Phœnix from her ashes, and coming forth from the furnace of temptation, leave only the dross behind.

Having, through divine mercy, obtained grace to be faithful—in providence received my education —and been called to minister in the church of England, I have embraced and subscribed her articles, *ex animo*, and have continued to prefer an episcopal mode of government ; and I am content herein to abide with God, till I can find one more purely apostolic. But, disclaiming all *exclusive* pretensions, and joined to the Lord in one spirit, with all the faithful of every denomination, I candidly avow my conviction, that the true Church is *catholic*, or universal ; not monopolized by any one body of professing Christians, but essentially *a spiritual Church* ; and consisting only and equally of those who, in every denomination, love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Respecting the administration of *this Church*, I am not convinced that the Lord of Life and Glory left any precise regulations. His kingdom could alike subsist under any species of government ; and having nothing to do with this world, was in externals to be regulated by existing circumstances. Whether episcopacy, a presbytery, or the congregational order, be established as the dominant profession, it affects not the body of Christ. The *living members*, under each of these modes of

administration, are alike bound to love one another out of a pure heart, fervently ; to indulge their brethren in the same liberty of private judgment which they exercise themselves ; and ought never to suffer these regulations of outward order to destroy the unity of the spirit, or to break the bonds of peace.

When I speak of episcopacy, as most correspondent, in my poor ideas, to the apostolic practice, and the general usage of the Church in the first, and generally esteemed purer ages, let no man imagine I plead for that episcopacy, which rising very early on the stilts of prelatical pride and worldly-mindedness, has since overspread the earth with its baneful shadow ; or suppose those to be the true successors of the apostles, who, grasping at power and pre-eminence over Churches, which their labours never planted or watered, claim dominion over districts, provinces, kingdoms, beyond all power of individual superintendence. These, *all*, *every where*, and *in every age*, have manifested the same spirit of Antichrist ; and that just in proportion as their usurpation of authority over the Churches and the consciences of men, hath been most extensive, most exclusive, and most intolerant.

The following sketch of *the Primitive Church*, will not, I hope, be found to deviate far from what appears in the sacred records. Beginning at Jerusalem, from thence the apostles, and great *itinerant Evangelists*, issued forth publishing the glad tidings

of salvation, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever their labours were effectual, and Jews or Gentiles were called to the obedience of faith, there, as soon as a few united for worship, in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers, they appointed the person most apt to teach, and of best report among their brethren, to lead the devotions of the faithful. He was usually an elderly man ; and one who possessed an house, where this little congregation might assemble. He became their presbyter, or bishop ; terms in the scripture *evidently synonimous.** All looked at first to Jerusalem, as the centre to which doubts and difficulties were to be referred, and from whence direction should be received.

The learned Chancellor King supposes, that to the end of the third century, the largest and most populous cities had but one church and one bishop. That the presbyters, though of the same order with the bishop, and capable of performing all episcopal offices, as soon as elected into a parish or diocese, yet till then were only his vicars. But, I think, a simpler mode, and one more conformable to the Scriptures, can be traced. When one congregation increased beyond the capacity of the first house to accomodate it, another was formed, and another elder or presbyter appointed. There were *several bishops* at Philippi, no very

* See Archbishop Usher's Letters—Lord King's Primitive Church—Cranmer and Bishop's Conferences—Burnet's Reformation, vol. I. page 223, 324.

extensive city, Philip. i. 1. ; many episcopal elders were at Ephesus, who met Paul at Miletum, Acts xx. 28, and probably in every other place where the Gospel had made any considerable progress. From the number of converts at Jerusalem, from the company of great itinerant evangelists at Antioch, from the multitude of Christians at Ephesus, and of teachers, true and false, at Corinth ; it can hardly be supposed possible that they should all assemble in one place, or be under the superintendence of a particular person, intimately acquainted with every member of his congregation down to the meanest slave, and which, as King affirms, was the duty of every bishop or presbyter. Hence it seems most natural to infer, that where the believers multiplied, another house or church was opened, and a new bishop ordained. Yet all united in one church fellowship, under the superintendence of the apostolic men at first, and, on their decease, the most distinguished for zeal, wisdom, sufferings, influence, or respectability of any kind, was called by the suffrage of the elders and people to be their superintendent, president, præsul, (*ēgoumenos**) and thus the name of bishop, (*kat' exochēn*†) became very early appropriate to one who was the *primus inter pares*, and, as Archbishop Usher says, *gradu tantum non ordine differebat*, differed in degree only of advancement, and not in order. These were, I apprehend, always from the apostolic days raised to this station, by the voice of the people and their fellows ; they presided in the deliberations of their several churches, with the presbyters their

* A Leader. † On account of pre-eminence.

assessors. They were deputed to all synods, which treated of ecclesiastical matters. And whilst every congregation judged its own members, they received the accusations against Elders, who were charged with offence, and censured or removed them. They examined the chosen candidates for the ministry, and with the presbytery, ordained them by imposition of hands. This dangerous eminence marked them as peculiar victims in days of persecution. Far, therefore, from being an enviable or desirable situation, no man dared aspire after, or occupy it, but such as counted their lives not dear unto themselves, that they might finish their course with joy, and the ministry which they had received of the Lord to fulfil it, whether as confessors, or martyrs.

In the sequel of this work such worthies will be seen rising up in the simplicity of a faithful testimony for Christ, the pillars of the Church of the living God: not decked with earthly splendor, or gorgeous apparel; not ruling extensive dioceses, with vast revenues, but plain men, wearing often the garb of poverty and humility, in no eminence of birth, or of philosophical or scientific attainments; devoting their own little substance, as well as what the piety of the faithful entrusted to their care, to the noblest acts of charity; eminently self-denied in their own conduct, and exhibiting to their flocks the brightest examples of deadness to the world, and heavenly mindedness; employing their lives in unwearied labours for the souls of

men ; and affecting no pre-eminence above their fellows, but that which age, excellence, and superior service, naturally secured to them. Where the danger was so great, and the advantage so small, a man of God could only be constrained by conscience, and the suffrage of his brethren, or by ardent zeal for the glory of his Lord to undertake the awful charge. Such were the primitive bishops appointed by the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls. The imposition of hands confirmed the people's choice, and acknowledged the divine call, placing these in the foremost rank of death and dignity.[1]

The history of the Church naturally divides itself into three great periods.

The first comprising its rise and progress in the four first centuries, till the exclusive establishment of Theodosius.

The second, the deep decline and dreadful apostacy of the eleven succeeding ages.

The third, the happy revival of evangelical religion, from the times of the Reformation to the close of the present century.

PREFACE.

THE great design of the adorable Redeemer when he came down from Heaven, was to procure peace upon earth, and good will towards men. To correspond with this desirable and blessed purpose, is the great end and object of this history; particularly, amidst the various denominations into which the Christian world is divided, to unite in one holy bond of love, all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, without any consideration of the country they may occupy, the forms of church government they have embraced, or the unessential differences in religious opinions, which through the present infirmity of intellect, or the prejudices of education, they may have imbibed. The true Church has but one head, even Christ; and we are all members one of another. It will be a better proof of our genuine Christianity, infinitely more conduce to the spread of the Gospel, and tend unspeakably more to the edification of our own souls, to love one another out of a pure heart fervently, and to bear and forbear with each other in subordinate matters, than to contend for systems or exclusive establishments.

It is impossible to doubt the excellence, to dispute the ability, to question the learning, or impeach the purity of many, who have demonstrated the genuineness of their faith and hope under all our different modes of religious profession, the Papists themselves not excepted. And if the great Head of the Church will not exclude them from his kingdom and glory, and we are bound to hope that we shall meet and be joined together in one holy fellowship through a blessed eternity, how powerfully does this call upon us to cultivate a greater enlargement of heart towards all the holy brethren! We leave to bigots, and

the unblest, to execrate, excommunicate, and unchristianize every man that gathers not with them, and dares to differ a hair's breadth from their dogmas or decisions. But if the spirit of love and of a sound mind, has truly taken possession of our bosoms, we shall feel too much of the blessedness of the temper itself, to suffer unhallowed encroachments thereon. We shall watch every avenue of the heart, at which bitterness and wrath, and anger and clamour, and evil speaking would enter, to disturb the repose of our own souls, and to trouble our brethren; and shall exemplify the character of the elect of God, holy, and beloved, by putting on bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering. These will always carry irresistable evidence to the conscience, that we have been truly baptised into Christ, and have put on Christ. Whilst, if any man hath not *this spirit of Christ*, whatever else he may conceit he possesses, assuredly HE IS NONE OF HIS. It is my wish and prayer, therefore, whilst the truth is to be sought with impartiality, that the heart may be enlarged in Charity, and ennobled with love, without dissimulation; for if we have the head and tongue of men or of angels, and have not this divine temper in exercise, we should be but as sounding brass and tinkling cymbol. These are truths which can never be too deeply impressed on the conscience, and inculcated by all who are true Churchmen. And I pray God, that whoever reads the following pages may grow more into this disposition, and look up to Him who giveth man knowledge, that every fresh acquirement may be accompanied with an equal measure of fidelity, devotedness and love to God our Saviour, and to every soul redeemed by his most precious blood, whether in circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free.

AN

IMPARTIAL HISTORY

OF THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST.

PERIOD FIRST.

CENTURY I.——*SECTION I.*

PROGRESS OF *CHRISTIANITY*, FROM THE BIRTH OF *CHRIST* TO THE CLOSE OF THE SCRIPTURE CANON.

CHAPTER I.

THE LIFE OF CHRIST.

THE Author of our Salvation, the incarnate SON OF GOD, was born in Bethlehem, in the days of Herod the Idumean, who had been raised by Augustus, the Roman emperor, to the throne of Judea. The precise year of his birth hath been disputed by learned chronologists. It seems, however, but of little importance; it is sufficient that the Evangelists have described this great and singular event in the fullest manner, and in all its circumstances. The first years of his infancy, after his flight from the bloody tyrant, were spent in Egypt; and from his return to his native land, until he entered on his ministry, we have but one authentic trait recorded of his earlier days, when his thirst

for knowledge detained him at the temple at Jerusalem, and the Jewish rabbies were astonished at his understanding and answers. Luke ii. 47.

From twelve years of age he lived in a state of subjection to his parents at Nazareth, Luke ii. 51, and there is every reason to suppose that he worked at his father's occupation, as a carpenter, ministering to his parents' necessities and his own, Mark vi. 3. The labors of industry are honorable employments.

About the age of thirty he was solemnly inaugurated in office by his forerunner John, receiving the rite of baptism and the fulness of the Spirit: and, after the awful conflict with the great enemy of mankind, in the wilderness, he entered on his ministry, and shewed himself unto Israel as the Messiah. During three years or more, the space which seems recorded by the Evangelists, we behold a display of such a character as had never before appeared among the children of men. His life was spent in the noblest acts of beneficence to the bodies and souls of men. His whole temper and conduct were the living comment of the sublime and heavenly truths which he taught. His doctrines bore the broad stamp of DEITY in their intrinsic excellence; and received the fullest confirmation from the most astonishing miracles, performed in his own name, and at his own pleasure. Every word, every action, from the day of his birth, until his expiring cry on the cross, concurred in demonstrating the truth of the Centurian's testimony, "*Truly this was the Son of God.*"

His ministry and miracles awakened vast attention, but excited equal envy and enmity. A few,

and but a few, dared to join themselves unto him, and confess him as the Messiah; and these, the least and lowest among the people. His principal and first followers, whom he called to be Apostles, or Missionaries, were chiefly fishermen, Galileans, poor and illiterate. From them he chose twelve to be his companions, and witnesses of all his wondrous words and works; afterwards he appointed seventy others, whom he sent forth to preach and teach the coming of his kingdom. Before his departure, the number of his disciples had increased to above five hundred. 1 Cor. xv. 6.

So inconsiderable appeared the effects of Christ's personal ministry upon earth, notwithstanding all the miracles performed before the thousands of Israel. Nor did even these as yet truly understand the nature of that kingdom of God which should come. Swayed by the prevailing prejudices of their countrymen, and the traditions of their elders, they still looked for a temporal Messiah, and expected that at this time he would restore the kingdom to Israel. Acts i. 6. A fond opinion, which they were reluctant to part with, but which disappeared from the day that the Spirit was poured out from on high. In his frequent conferences with them, after his resurrection from the dead, Christ had commanded them to wait for this Holy Ghost at Jerusalem: comforting them with the assurance, that after his ascension into heaven he would send them another comforter, whose efficacious teachings should not only lead them into *all truth*, but whose almighty power should enable

them to perform greater works and wonders than those which he himself had wrought, or they had ever yet beheld. The fulfilment of this was eminently displayed, in *the gift of tongues*, whereby these illiterate men were enabled to spread the gospel through all nations, and what was still a greater instance of divine energy than all the mighty miracles performed by them, by the same Spirit they were endued with power from on high, to call from *the grave of Spiritual death* the millions who should hear their voice and live.

I wave enlarging on the particulars, which will be found in the Evangelists, of his life of toil and sufferings, terminated by a death of ignominy and torment—his triumphs over the grave—his commission and instructions given to his disciples after his resurrection—his glorious ascension—and the descent of the Holy Ghost on those whom he had chosen to be the witnesses of his works; the heralds of his gospel; and the confessors and martyrs for the truth. Suffice it to say, that from the head Christ, the vital power was derived which animated the first preachers of the cross: the same divine influence hath continued through all the ages past; and to this day, it ceases not to be displayed in the hearts and consciences of all the redeemed from the earth. United in one mystical body, these are alike all taught of the same God, and animated by the same Spirit; and, without this Spirit, whatever profession of Christ any man may make, *he is none of his*, (Rom. viii. 9.) and knows nothing as he ought to know: since *no man can say that*

Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost, (1 Cor. xii. 3.) nor can any life of Christ appear in our mortal bodies, but as he giveth us of his Spirit, and we *are created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works*. To this, as the most important of all truths, the whole revelation of God leads: and I regard it as the principal object in this ecclesiastical history, to search out the spiritual Israel of God in all ages, and among all the nations whither the light of divine truth hath been diffused.

I cannot close this life of Christ without adverting to an absurd tradition, preserved in Eusebius, respecting letters to a King Agbarus. And I do this in order to shew how little credit can be placed on this father of ecclesiastical history, as he has been called, pretending to derive the evidence of these fabulous epistles from the archives of Edessa. The more I consider Eusebius's character, the less I am disposed to recieve his testimony in this and many other particulars: and it is much to be lamented that the scantiness of original information has reduced historians so often and so largely to copy from him as authority. That he may have preserved many traditional truths need not be disputed; but whoever reads his works must see how very credulous he was, and how little to be implicitly believed. The traditions of two hundred years, flowing often through the muddy channels of human weakness, folly and fraud, had transmitted a stream very unlike the pure waters of life, from the sacred fountain. Besides, his own senti-

ments in some of the most fundamental doctrines of the gospel were fearfully swerved from the apostolic model; and his courtly practice too conformed to this world to stamp veracity on his representations. I fear he knew as little of *real christianity* as his royal disciple Constantine whom he so egregiously flatters. The more I read the more I doubt the authenticity of his testimony, and dare not receive his history as oracular.

CHAPTER II.

THE RAPID SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL FROM THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

WHEN Jesus glorified poured out his Spirit from on high upon his disciples, according to his promise, a flood of light instantly broke forth on a benighted world. The Sun of Righteousness arose, and from Jerusalem darted his bright beams on every side through the known world.

Dismal and dark at that time was the state of mankind. *The Heathens* were sunk in the grossest idolatry; sullied with every vice, (see Rom. i. 21—32;) their consciences cauterised; and the foulest crimes sanctified by the very examples of the gods whom they worshipped. *The Jews* were infected with equal abominations, (see Rom. ii. 17—24.) zealous indeed for Moses, proud of their fœdral relation to Abraham, precise in the formalities of worship and the minutiæ of ceremonies, but dead to all spiritual religion, and, as their own histoian Josephus witnesses, fallen into the deepest depravity of manners, and all kinds of profligacy. The whole earth appeared immerged in the universal deluge of prevailing corruption. But no sooner did the inspired fishermen of Galilee go forth in the name of their divine Master to testify of the world that its deeds were evil, than irresistible conviction seized on the consciences of

men. On the very day of Pentecost, when they instantly began with power to bear witness to the resurrection of their divine Master, and to declare the eternal redemption purchased by his blood-shedding for us, three thousand souls were added to the church ; and myriads, within a very short space of time, confessed him as their Lord, whom they had rejected as an impostor, and crucified as a blasphemer. Probably the very persons stood forth the witnesses for his cross, who had most contributed to nail him thereon. See Acts ii. 23—37.

The sudden ability of illiterate men—of so great a number—in a moment—and with perfection—to speak in *all* languages—to express themselves with such propriety and force, as not only to be clearly understood, but impressive on the consciences of the numerous foreigners then assembled at Jerusalem from every nation under heaven—Such a phenomenon could not but strike the hearers with astonishment, and afford an evidence of divine agency too incontestible to admit of a rational doubt. But even this would only have excited a momentary sensation of wonder and surprize, if *the same Spirit* who gave the tongue to speak, had not opened the ear to hear, and the heart to understand. *Instantly*, and with the deepest convictions of the truth, their consciences were pierced, as with a sword, and they cried out under the word, *Men and brethren what shall we do?* Acts ii. 37. They immediately received the fœderal rite of baptism, joined themselves to the

despised followers of the crucified Nazarene, and were received into the bosom of the Christian Church; *partaking in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayer.* Speedily they filled Jerusalem with their doctrine, to the inexpressible joy of the poor, to whom the gospel was preached, and to the excitement of the deepest malignity and wrath in the pharisees and scribes, the rulers of Israel, whose earthly, sensual hearts persisted in the rejection of the counsel of God against their own souls. Let infidels read, blaspheme and tremble!

Two events naturally flowed from these commencements. 1. The exasperated spirit of the enemies of Christ sought to strangle in the cradle the infant church. A fierce persecution arose from the Jewish zealots, and Stephen led the way to the noble army of martyrs. Acts vii. 60. 2. Dispersed in order to save themselves from the rage of their enemies, many of the disciples fled from Jerusalem into the different parts of Palestine, and the adjacent territories, and wherever they went, carried with them the tidings of salvation through their crucified Lord, and, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles, with the most prodigious effects. Some also of the first converts who had returned from Jerusalem, after the day of Pentecost, to their several abodes, widely dispersed the same blessed truth, which they themselves had been taught by the power of the Holy Ghost. The success of some of these among the Jews at Damascus awakened the bigot fury of the zealot Saul.

Ambitious of a commission from the high-priest to seize, imprison, punish, and bring in chains to Jerusalem, any whom he should find in that city converts to the christian doctrine, reeking with the blood of the martyr Stephen, and filled with all the pride of brief authority, with which he had been invested, he is ready to dart on his prey. The issue is well known, and affords one of the most striking instances ever recorded of the power of the grace of Christ over the most blind, bitter and obdurate of mankind.

I pass rapidly over the simple, beautiful narrative of transactions recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. To these I shall be called to advert more fully in a subsequent page. Suffice it at present to remark the glowing zeal, the fervent charity, the noble disinterestedness, the holy walk, and the divine consolations of the Spirit, which marked the disciples as a body, and proved the genuineness of the faith which they professed.

The Church at Jerusalem seems to have been under the presidence of the Apostle James. Peter's pre-eminence either among the Jews in Palestine, or the Gentiles in the nations, no where appears. And as to the idea of his being the founder and bishop of the church at Rome, it is evident that it was raised by no labours of his, and a matter very doubtful whether he ever visited that metropolis of the world.

The great luminary was now arising to carry the light of the everlasting gospel into the heathen

nations, and to display a scene of labours and success unequalled in the records of the Christian Church. The wretch who breathed nothing but threatnings and slaughter against the fold of Christ, arrested in his mad career, is suddenly changed by the power of the Spirit of Jesus, from a persecutor to a preacher, from Saul the murderer, to Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles. The greater part of the ACTS contain the account of his life and labours, recorded by his faithful attendant, and companion in the work, LUKE the Evangelist. By his unwearied exertions, in conjunction with those of his brethren engaged in the same blessed work, the light of truth was in a very short space of time diffused through all countries of the immense Roman Empire, and even far beyond its remotest bounds; where flourishing churches were planted innumerable, adorned with every gift and grace of the Holy Ghost. The most remarkable of these will come under our consideration when we enter into a more particular detail of the labours of those men of God, who went forth preaching *every where*; confining indeed at first the circle of their operations to their Jewish brethren, but shortly after unfolding, by particular order of their adorable Master, the gates of life to the Gentile world, and collecting from all kindreds, tongues, nations and languages, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, a people to the eternal praise of the glory of his grace.

The history of the Acts of the Apostles closes with Pauls first imprisonment at Rome, where he

found a church already formed, to whose establishment his own beautiful epistle had no doubt greatly contributed; and which, during his confinement, his labours of love abundantly enlarged. On his return to the same place, under the tyrant Nero, he seems to have closed his shining career, and is said to have there sealed his testimony with his blood. The state of the church during this period is chiefly to be drawn from the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of Paul, with some additions from those of Peter, James, John and Jude. These authentic records we follow with confidence and certainty; the moment we step beyond this sacred circle, our materials are few, and the authority of them questionable.

CHAPTER III.

THE LIVES AND LABOURS OF THE APOSTLES.

DURING the first period of christianity the lives and labours of the divinely qualified Evangelists demand our particular consideration: as the state and government of the church will best appear in the course of their itinerancy, and the happy success of their preaching.

PAUL.

Though called the last to the apostleship, terming himself but as an abortion, and coining a word on purpose to express his sense of his own diminutiveness, Paul stands allowedly in the first rank of eminence. In nothing behind the very chief of the apostles, according to his own confession, and in my view, shining in a sphere of peculiar splendor,

Velut inter ignes Luna minores. } As the moon amidst the smaller stars.

whilst the generality of the others were chosen out of the lowest orders of society, (*agrammatoi te idiotai*,*) (Acts iv. 13.) men of no literary acquirements, Paul seems to have been born in the superior

* Unlettered and private, or Laymen.

ranks of life : a Roman citizen by birth, of Tarsus in Cilicia ; the son of a respectable Pharisee, in a pure line of honourable descent ; his father in a capacity to afford the first education for his son in the school of Jerusalem, under the tuition of the learned Gamaliel ; and to support him many years in the prosecution of his studies in this metropolis of Jewish learning and glory. His abilities were great as his station in life was respectable ; and his proficiency in scientific attainments singular ; "*above*, says he, *many of my equals in mine own nation.*" But his exemplary piety still more eminently adorned his youthful progress ; peculiarly observant of the Mosaic institutions, he embraced with zeal the traditions of the Elders, and rigid in Pharisaical prejudices, he became on principal a determined persecutor. He thought *he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth* ; which things he ardently pursued, compelling the feeble to blaspheme, and stoning to death the steadfast ; and being exceedingly mad against them, he persecuted them even to strange cities. He had been taught to regard the Son of Mary as an impostor and blasphemer, and to hate him with a hatred peculiarly bitter, as an apostate from the Law of Moses, and for attempting to draw a way disciples after him to the dishonour of Jehovah and his divinely appointed institutions. In the very act of savage pursuit after these suffering followers of the despised Galilean, the strong arm of Almighty Grace arrested him in his mid career. He hears the voice of Jesus, and struck with the lightning of his conntenance, is

cast prostrate on the earth before the adorable personage whom he was persecuting in his members. After three days suffering the loss of sight, and deeper darkness and horror of mind from reflections on his own former conduct, the healing hand of Ananias, and his yet more consolatory words, restored him at once to the light of day and the light of life. The scales which fell from his eyes opened again a passage for the beams of the sun ; but a brighter Sun shone upon his heart, and that Jesus whom he had so bitterly persecuted had given him *the light of the knowledge of his glory*. *No moment's delay* retarded his open confession of his glorified Lord ; he arose straight way and was baptised in his name ; and as soon as his strength, exhausted through fasting and anguish of mind, was restored by peace of conscience and return to his necessary food, he immediately commenced his shining course, and holding up the Word of Light, proclaimed him in the synagogue as the son of God, whom he had blasphemed as an impostor, and whose worshippers he had come thither on purpose to extirpate. I wish the enemies to Christianity impartially to consider the conversion of the Apostle Paul, and all its concomitant circumstances. This will assuredly be found among the many other evidences of the truth of our religion, such a one as will leave those without excuse who neglect so great salvation. *Their* conversion, indeed, I am fully sensible, can only be effected by the same divine power which wrought in this arch-enemy of the Christian name, and if not in a way as miracu-

lous, yet will be attended with evidence as real, that "this hath God done, and we shall percieve that it is his work." From the first bursting forth of this chosen vessel out of the womb of darkness into Christ's marvellous light, his activity in the cause which he had embraced, exceeded the ardour of persecution by which he had been distinguished. He flew as with the wings of a seraph over the habitable globe, and the vastness of his success corresponded with the rapidity of his movements, and the indefatagable labours of his ministry. From Damascus to Arabia, Judea, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and round about unto Illyricum, he had fully preached the Gospel of Christ. Returning with the same unwearied diligence to visit all the Churches his ministry had planted, he received a divine intimation that he must shortly visit Italy also; and he extended his views into Spain. An eye cast over this immense tract of country will fill us with astonishment how one man's labour could fill so extensive a sphere, and demonstrates how much may be done when the Spirit of Jesus animates, and the benediction of the Holy Ghost accompanies the Gospel word with power, and in much assurance.

The particular enumeration of the flourishing Churches collected by his Ministry, will come more properly under our consideration when we enter upon his Epistles. He gratefully acknowledges how greatly his blessed Master caused him to triumph, and made manifest by him the favour of his grace in every place, in Damascus, Antioch

Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, Galatia, the regions of Greece, at Rome, the capital of the world, and innumerable other places, of which no records remain; for *every where* he preached, and taught Jesus Christ, and in *every place* the Spirit of God made his ministrations the savour of life unto life.

There is one particular I may not forget, and which we Gentiles are bound to acknowledge with peculiar thankfulness; that he is eminently our Apostle. The other Apostles restricted their labours at least for a while, *to the Jews only*, (Acts xi. 19.) and it required a particular revelation to engage Peter to visit Cornelius, (Acts, ch. x.) nor did that cast down the wall of separation, but was regarded as a singular case. It was reserved for Paul, by an express vision, to be sent from the Temple far off unto the Gentiles. Yet even HE, in compliance with the respect he bore to his brethren after the flesh, commenced with the synagogue; being there rejected, leaving them without excuse, he turned to the heathen, and among them reaped that abundant harvest, the happy effects of which are continued unto this day. We shall see in the consideration of the nature of the Churches formed by him, what opposition he met from his Jewish brethren in many places, and rejoice in the decree which settled Christian liberty and equal privileges.

A ministry of more than thirty years was terminated, it is probable, by martyrdom. On his

second visit, as a prisoner, to Rome, he considers himself as ready to be offered up, and cheerfully prepares to seal with his blood the testimony he had borne. I regard Paul as the first of human beings, to whom more are indebted for salvation, under the Great Head of the Church, than to any other creature. If his labours and preaching, as recorded, be taken into the account—if we consider his Epistles to the several Churches, the inestimable blessed effects of which must be felt and acknowledged in all Churches to the end of time—if we mark the precision and clearness with which the characteristic doctrines of the Gospel therein are displayed—and the infinitely greater blessings derived from them to the Christian world in general, beyond all that individual Churches, to which they were addressed, could possibly have reaped—who is there that hath ever, since the day of their promulgation, but blessed the Great Head of the Church for the Apostle Paul?—I do not put *Saint*, before his name, to enoble him, for that title he enjoys only in common with every believer. There is not an individual joined to the Lord in one spirit, but is *called to be a Saint*. With regard to Paul, he might justly say of himself, I am more; in labours, suffering, blessing, success, raised above his fellows. The ridiculous distinction of a red letter in the calendar, he would have treated as contemptibly as any man can possibly do it for him. As the chief of sinners he gloried in being saved by grace; and having much forgiven, he endeavoured to express his sensibility, by labouring more abundantly than they all. His

judgment, like that of every other poor sinner, is with God, the judge of all. I expect to see him first at the right hand of his Divine Master.

PETER.

Peter, though not the first called to apostleship, nor probably the chief in honor, eminence and usefulness, ranks high in the sacred college. Zealous for his divine master; intrepid in spirit; the first in forwardness; and acknowledged as among the chief pillars of the Church, by one of its most competent judges, Peter stands next to Paul in the rank of the noble army of martyrs and confessors. No man during our Lord's life expressed stronger attachment to him, followed him with greater fidelity, or shewed on every occasion but one, a soul more devoted to his honor and service. When his Master's resurrection was announced, his eager spirit led him among the foremost to run to the sepulchre; and to him of all his Apostles, the Lord of Life and Glory was pleased first to manifest himself, after his victory over the grave. He needed this token of favour to bind up the wounds of his broken heart, after his late sudden, and fearful fall. Who is safe from temptation when such a man gives such an humiliating evidence of human infirmity?

He appears after the descent of the Holy Glost among the most intrepid witnesses for his adorable Lord, and the bold accuser of his betrayers and murderers, His zeal, his sufferings, his success on the very first day of Pentecost, and all his sub-

sequent conduct, prove how justly he merited the regard in which he was held by the Church at Jerusalem. The Acts of the Apostles record in a very great part of them the labours of this worthy of the true David.

He, like his brethren, was for a while still under the restrictive bond of confining the preaching of the Gospel to the Jewish pale. An immediate revelation from God, which sent him to Cornelius, was not sufficient entirely to subdue his prejudices; and though afterwards he stood up to vindicate Gentile liberty, he himself seemed still too partial to his Jewish brethren, and received at Antioch the just rebuke of Paul for his dissimulation. The best of men are not without blame; and grace of the most enlarged measure may not wholly eradicate educational prejudices. Yet he triumphed over them at last, and his Epistles appear addressed to the Gentile converts scattered through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who had probably shared the benefits of his ministry, and through whom, to the latest ages, the Church will receive the edification of those beautiful letters, though immediately written for the use of his cotemporaries.

It seems to have been a matter decided by the Church respecting the two itinerant Apostles, that Paul should go to the Gentiles, and Peter to the circumcision. I suppose there was great wisdom herein displayed. The strong prejudices entertained by the Jews against Paul rendered him

peculiarly obnoxious, and would make them more indisposed to receive his ministry: whilst Peter, from having expressed a partiality, sometimes even blamable, for his brethren after the flesh, was more likely to engage their attention, and conciliate their regard.

Respecting the sphere of his labours, we have no authentic records, except the Acts of the Apostles and his own Epistles. In these his services appear to have been eminently useful in Judea and Samaria. We find him at Antioch; and probably through all Asia Minor he had preached to those to whom he directed his two Epistles. It is highly probable that the East was the great scene of his labours, where the remnant of the twelve tribes had left a numerous posterity; and I have been led to suppose, that the *(ē en Babulōni suneklektē,*)* 1 Pet. v. 13. which we translate, "*The Church which is at Babylon elect together with you,*" as joined with "*Marcus my son,*" was either his *wife*, whom he had married at Babylon, probably in the course of his ministry, or *the Church* there planted by his labours; for such appears the natural sense of the words. The idea that this refers to Rome seems a most unfounded interpretation. No vestige appears in the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of Paul, or his own, of his having ever visited the western regions, nor does Rome ever appear in any of them under this title. The trumped-up tradition of after times, to give dignity and pre-eminence

to that metropolis of the world, with all the horrid abuses which have flowed from it, hath ever appeared to me among the frauds, against which, whoever reads ecclesiastical history must be continually on their guard. He will see from Eusebius to Bellarmine, a tissue of improbable fictions, to give dignity to a Church which is truly the mother of harlots and of all abominations. His contest with Simon the sorcerer, and miraculous victory, are among the apocryphal tales of the credulous ecclesiastical historian Eusebius. That he finished his course as a martyr for those truths which he so zealously preached is highly probable, not merely as the report of tradition, but as it seems predicted by his blessed Master. John xxi. 19, but of the time, the manner, and place of his death, we have no authentic record.

Of the other Apostles of the Lord, the Scriptures make but a scanty mention; and little credit is to be paid to the fables concerning them, which the after ages invented to supply the lack of other evidence.

ANDREW

Was the first called to the apostleship. He had attended the ministry of John the Baptist, and hearing him point out Jesus when he passed by, as the Lamb of God, he, with a companion, immediately followed him; and the conversation of the Great Master that day convinced him of his true character, as *the Christ*. A discovery so important could not dwell in his bosom a moment concealed:

he hastened to impart it to his own brother Simon, and eagerly introduced him to an acquaintance with the Messiah. All the days of his Master's abode upon earth, he was his faithful follower, and constant attendant; and he is mentioned by name as among those who continued in prayer to their adorable Lord at Jerusalem, for the promise which he had left them, Acts i. 13. His labours, no doubt, were correspondent to his station, though no divine record informs us of the peculiar scenes of his ministry. Churches ambitious of having Apostles for their founders, traced often their origin from sources which they supposed would do them honor. Since superstition has bowed its head, the real Christian no longer prides himself in the dignity of his Church, but is alone solicitous that he should be found in Christ, and faithful unto death.

JOHN

Was the beloved disciple. Jesus was a man: amiableness engaged his affection. John lay in his bosom. He was admitted to the glorious scene of transfiguration on the Mount, and to behold the more awful spectacle of the agony in the garden. His faithful attachment withheld him from deserting his Master at the last trying conflict. Though he shared in the momentary panic, when all his disciples forsook him, and fled, he was the first to recover from the consternation: he followed Christ into the High Priest's Palace; and stood by his cross at the mournful scene of crucifixion. To

him the dying Lord commended his agonizing mother; and honored by the charge, he immediately took her to his own home, and provided for her as a dutiful son. After Christ's resurrection, he was the first to run to the tomb on the report of the women. Love added wings to his feet, when he outran Peter; and what he saw seems to have engaged his credit to the testimony which he had heard.

He appears among the zealous confessors at Jerusalem, and Peter's companion at the Temple: great in the miracles wrought by him, great in the testimony borne to his adorable Master, great in suffering for his name's sake. Yet of his life, remarkably extended, we have few authentic particulars. His Gospel, Epistles, and Revelations, breathe a spirit of distinguished love and honor for his glorious Lord; and stand the living monuments of God, the Spirit, speaking in him and by him, for the edification, comfort, and instruction of the Church to the latest ages.

He seems, with his brethren the Apostles, to have long spent his labours among his countrymen in Palestine, and to have shared in their sufferings. The *Revelations* speak of him as banished to the Isle of Patmos for the testimony of Jesus; but where he chiefly lived, or where, or how he died, we have no authentic record. It is said he was martyred at Ephesus, about three or four years after his return from banishment. (About An. 100.)

The tradition respecting this great Apostle, of his flying from Cerinthus the heretic in the bath, however justifiable abhorrence of an apostate from truth may be, comes through Ireneus after a third generation. Tertullian's caldron of boiling oil, from which he is said to have escaped, appears alike apocryphal. These suppositious miracles add nothing to the Church's glory. The Acts of the Apostles furnish such abundance—the constant miracle of tongues—the power of communicating the same miraculous gifts to others—render these traditionary, unsupported relations as doubtful as they are useless. They do but weaken instead of strengthen the cause. Christianity loses nothing of its divine evidence, by our acknowledgment of the credulity, pious frauds, and fictitious records, which, through the weakness of some, and the wickedness of others, appeared very soon after the Apostles' days.

His pursuit of a youth, his convert, whom he recovered from robbers, and brought to repentance, has as little authenticity as the rest, and is as needless. No doubt, numerous, and as singular conversons as this were wrought by the Apostle's ministry among young and old, as is by our own this very day. The story may be true or false; it is trivial, and hardly deserving a place in history.

Of two of the Apostles bearing the name of James, the one the son of Zebedee, and the other of Alpheus, called also the brother of the Lord, (Gal. i. 19.) we have the testimony of Luke that

the first was numbered with the noble army of martyrs; and of Josephus, that the second followed his example.

JAMES, the son of Zebedee, fell one of the first victims to Jewish prejudice and enmity. To gratify the chiefs of the Sanhedrim, and those under their influence, he was slain at Jerusalem with a sword. The account given Acts xii. makes no mention of his accuser converted by him, and instantly executed with him. The traditions of Eusebius, the more they are examined the less stamp of authority they bear. The man who dared shed his blood for the testimony of Jesus Christ must, by his zeal, labours, and success in turning many from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, have wrought conversions more and more singular than this late reported story. Herod Agrippa, like other base and cruel politicians, thought these sacrifices to popular resentment a cheap way of reconciling the people to his tyranny.

The Lord's brother, the other James was martyred, according to the account of Josephus, during the change of Governors from Festus to Albinus, when the High Priest Annanius, seizing a moment of brief authority, cited and condemned him for blasphemy, and had him immediately stoned on the spot. He was distinguished by the title of *the Just*, the noblest a mortal can bear: and the universally admitted excellence of his character, made his execution to be abhored and his

murderer censured, even by those who bore no good will to the Christian name.

Of the labours and death of the other Apostles, history furnishes no authentic materials. Tradition carries Thomas to the coast of Malabar; and tales as unsupported give others their several districts; but I rather suppose the truth to be, that their lives were spent in preaching through Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, as it is evident, that for a long time, the Gospel was almost wholly confined to the Synagogue, and the Apostles devoted to the service of their Jewish brethren. The dispersion, which is marked as happening on the martyrdom of Stephen, shews, that except occasional calls and excursions, they had usually kept together at Jerusalem and its vicinity; and if we consider the *myriads* (Acts xxi. 20.) who in that city were called to the obedience of the faith, we shall see there was abundant employment for many zealous and faithful labourers.

A multitude of worthies have their names recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, whose itinerant labours, with those of Paul, had the most powerful tendency to spread the Christian faith. On these I am prevented from dwelling, lest I swell a summary into a volume. One peculiar personage I would, however, not leave unnoticed, as having given occasion to so much superstition and idolatry, without a title in the Book of God to countenance the abominable practice.

MARY,

The mother of Jesus, is never once mentioned in the sacred records after the day of Pentecost, and but once after his resurrection. The compassionate Redeemer had commended her to the care of the beloved John, and he had taken her to his own house as his mother. She, with other women, attended the prayer meetings, with the Apostles, silent and undistinguished in the crowd; and after that is heard of no more. Not a trace of any peculiar honor or respect appears paid to her memory, alive or dead. She must have been at that time pretty far advanced in age, and not improbably finished her race, not in her house at Nazareth or Loretto, careful of the sacred porringer, but under the roof of her adopted son at Jerusalem. She has been peculiarly marked as the *Virgin* Mary, and that she was a *Virgin Mother* we have divine authority; but that she continued such, appears not at all probable. That Joseph *knew her not before* she brought forth her first-born son, seems to imply connubial union afterwards. There is not the least scriptural reason for the contrary. Neither Joseph nor Mary seem to have had explicit knowledge of the real dignity of the child born, and of the son given to them; however high their expectations of his future eminence might be; nor would this at all forbid their holy intercourse in marriage. The ridiculous idea of the superior sanctity of a married pair living together in a state of virginity, has not

the support of a word in the Bible, but the very reverse is enjoined. The most distant supposition of the fact no where appears in the Evangelists, and it is too absurd to be made an article of Protestant faith. Jesus being mentioned as *her first-born*, though not conclusive as to the argument, may well lead us to suppose there were other children: *The brethren of the Lord* are often mentioned, and though these may be regarded as relatives, standing in a more distant line of consanguinity, yet there seems no reason, as there appears no record to the contrary, why they should not have been *his* uterine brothers. His sisters are mentioned also with his mother, Matt. xv. 37; and he himself speaks of them all distinctly, as standing towards him in the same real relationship, Mark iii. 35; and, I confess, I have not the least idea of Mary being a character less estimable as a Mother than as a Virgin in any point of view; but rather the contrary, when we regarded her as the married wife of Joseph; and, perhaps, after his death, of Alpheus. The progress and reign of superstition in the Christian Church, has probably in no case been more horribly marked, than in the traditions invented, the honors paid, and the supremacy ascribed to this good woman. But the history of the Church is throughout deformed with these uncriptural inventions.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE NATURE AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, AS RECORDED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

I AM entering on a subject of perilous enterprise; the fierce contentions, and innumerable volumes which have been produced on the occasion, betray at least the violence of the different partizans, if they do not cast a decisive light on the subject. Probably if we well weighed the essentials of Christianity, and in the unity of one spirit, were above all things careful to maintain the bonds of peace, we should come nearer together on every material point, and in lesser matters bear and forbear; content to leave others what we claim ourselves, a right of examining the sacred records, and depending upon the spirit of truth for divine assistance to lead us into all truth. The lust of pre-eminence, the pride of life, and all the miserable objects of this world's gain and advantages, wherever they seize on the mind, darken the understanding, and distort the organs of vision. Hence the fruitful source of all the perversion of the oracles of God.

That the Church of Christ was spread with the rapidity of lightning; in a very short space of time occupied the vast extent of the Roman Empire, and passed beyond its bounds into the most

barbarous nations, we have the most conclusive evidence. That it had the most powerful obstacles to contend with, from the various established religions—the strong hand of power—the whole of what is stiled wisdom and philosophy, is equally admitted. Its conquests therefore must have proceeded from the divine energy attending the promulgation of the Gospel, and its own luminous evidence. For the persons immediately employed in the work, considered in themselves, were confessedly the most unlikely men in the world to have gained attention or procured converts; and unless the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven, had qualified them for their work, and accompanied their word with demonstration and power, how they should have ever succeeded in their attempts seems utterly inexplicable. Even infidels themselves must admit, that such men producing such effects, without Divine assistance, would be an event as contrary to whatever has yet happened in the world, as any of the miracles they are pleased to reject and ridicule.

Wherever the Gospel was preached, and sinners converted to God, churches were formed for the edification of the body of Christ. The whole was considered as *one body*, and acknowledged no other head but their master Christ, and themselves members one of another, actually influenced and animated by one spirit, really dwelling in the members, as in the head; without which no individual could properly be called of the church, and no church have a place in the mystical body, which

must be *the union of all*, in one faith, as in one Lord. This I regard as the sacred clue, which must lead us safely through the labyrinth of all ecclesiastical polemics, esteeming it an invariable axiom, that no man belongs to *any Christian Church* who has not *the spirit of Christ*, and *a fortiori*, that *no Church* has any pretensions to be a living member of his body, which in its ministers and members is not found joined to the Lord in one spirit. A church, without evidence of the influence, and experience of the operations of the Holy Ghost, hath but a name to "live and is dead;" and whatever may be its forms, or however sound its confessions of faith, it hath no more title to be reckoned *a Christian Church*, than a statue or a corpse has to be esteemed a living man.

The form in which the Church of Christ appeared in the best, the primitive age, under the immediate inspection of the Apostles and Disciples of the Lord, deserves our consideration. And here drawing around me the sacred circle, I wish to confine myself to the words of the Holy Ghost, without any regard to the traditions of men. And I shall begin at

JERUSALEM.

This was the fruitful womb from whence issued the noble army of Martyrs, Confessors and Evangelists, who holding up the word of light, diffused the brightness of the glory of God the Saviour to the ends of the earth. These were the fruit of our Lord's ministry during his labours in

Judea, and its adjacent countries. They consisted of twelve men, first chosen, called Apostles, or persons sent: who were the constant attendants of Jesus during his travels; the witnesses of his miracles, and the auditors of his heavenly discourses. To these were added seventy others, who were sent out to preach and teach; but to the lost sheep of the House of Israel only. They were all endued with miraculous powers and on their return from their itinerancy through the nation, reported with triumph the wonders they had wrought. Whether these men and others who succeeded them, had the power of working miracles at their will, I doubt; I rather think they possessed it only on peculiar occasions and under a special impulse from the Holy Ghost, directing when and what they should do. These were of the lowest order of the people. No ruler or Pharisee was found professing faith in Christ; and if some really inclined to believe on him, or hesitated respecting his character, they dared not openly avow what they felt, least they should be put out of the Synagogue. Thus Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were only his disciples secretly for fear of the Jews: by such men, however, and such means the most powerful effects were produced, and though the fruit of their ministry during the life of their Master, little appears yet a preparation was made for the reception of their testimony, when Jesus glorified sent down the mighty effusion of his Spirit on the witnesses whom he had chosen. Above five hundred brethren were summoned to behold our Lords ascension into

Heaven : and we can hardly suppose that any real disciple, capable of travelling, would be absent on that occasion. Of these, many who belonged to the more distant towns and villages probably returned to their own homes and families, expecting the great event which had been predicted ; whilst about an hundred and twenty abode at Jerusalem, and with Mary, and the other women kept their solemn assemblies there for prayer and supplication, waiting for the promise of the Father when they should be baptised with the Holy Ghost, as their Master had assured them (Acts i. 4, 5.) *not many days hence.* In this interval the Apostles filled up their number by the admission of Matthias in the room of Judas, and out of the two selected by suffrage after solemn prayer, and appeal to the Lord for direction, he was by lot numbered among the twelve to complete the sacred college.

The glories of the day of pentecost I shall pass over, in order to rest upon the blessed effects as they regard the Church, not dwelling on the miraculous powers communicated, but chiefly on the mighty influence of the Gospel word upon the consciences of men. In virtue of which the great additions were daily made of such as should be saved Three thousand believed the first day, and myriads followed them. (Acts xxi. 20.) Of these the whole body were of one heart and of one mind ; steadfastly continuing in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers, endued with such a spirit of love and liberality as engaged a generous distribution of

their substance: and though I apprehend no community of goods as a general right ever entered *into* any true Christian's mind, yet the use of them became common by the spirit of those who had possessions and sold them, and distributed the produce among their distressed brethren as every man had need.

The immensity of this body affords us two views of their church order.

1. As *necessarily* distributed into various congregations; no *one* place being capable of containing such *myriads*, nor any one Bishop or Elder sufficient to administer the sacred ordinances among them. We accordingly find them *breaking bread from house to house*, Acts ii. 46. *preaching and teaching in every house*, Acts v. 42. which seems to describe the manner of the Church at Jerusalem.

2. These several *House Churches* formed one united body under the presidence of James and not Peter, Acts xv. 13. He was at the head of the first counsel. To him Paul addressed himself, (Acts xxi. 18,) when all the Elders or Presbyters being assembled by him, he reported to them the happy success of his ministry among the Gentiles. The necessity of a president where so great a number of Elders resided, and so many congregations were formed, seems as natural for the preservation of order as it appears actually the case in this mother of all the Churches. Rome as yet was wholly Pagan.

But many observances in the Church of Jerusalem yet remained among the Jewish converts, never designed as a model for the Gentile churches. These were all zealous for the law, Acts xxi. 20. nor did they suppose themselves exempted from any of its obligations. They kept the Jewish sabbath, circumcised their children, attended the temple worship and the synagogues, and in all things scrupulously followed the Mosaic ritual; probably with greater strictness than their Jewish brethren. Yet they maintained at the same time the doctrines of grace, met on the first day of the week for Christian ordinances; and though they regarded the Jewish ceremonies as not yet abrogated, they looked for their acceptance with God, not from the deeds of the law, but from the righteousness of faith. This is evident in Paul's subsequent conversation with Peter at Antioch, when he had cause to rebuke him; and he was to be blamed. Gal. ii. 15, 16. The middle wall of partition had not been yet taken down.

The care of the poor widows led to the institution of Deacons. This originated in a complaint of real or supposed partiality in the distribution of the alms of the faithful to the native Jewish widows, in preference to the Helenists. Acts vi. 1. The Apostles being themselves too much engaged to attend to these temporal concerns, recommended it to the Church to elect seven persons for the discharge of this office. These were accordingly chosen by general suffrage, not for *each separate congregation*, but for the *whole body:* and by the

Apostles, after solemn prayer and imposition of hands, appointed to this service.

Though the care of the widows was immediately entrusted with these, it prevented them not from being employed in other labours of love. Philip was an Evangelist, and Stephen a like zealous advocate for Christ and his cause. In consequence of his boldness in the synagogue of the libertines, Acts vi. 9. the blood of this first martyr was shed by the fury of his bigot enemies: and a great and general persecution following, all the principal disciples were dispersed, except the Apostles, who remained at Jerusalem, Acts viii. 1. These flying in different directions, every where preached the Gospel, and with great success through Judea, Galilee and Samaria, and some as far as Antioch, Damascus, Phenice and Cyprus, yet to none but *to the Jews only*.

The success of Philip at Samaria, brought down to his aid Peter and John from Jerusalem, confirming the souls of the faithful, and confounding the sorcerer Simon Magus, by whom the people had been long seduced. A flourishing congregation, with miraculous powers, was there established. On their return, the villages around enjoyed the fruit of their labours. They were village preachers, highway preachers, and were not ashamed.

A singular event contributed to convey the Gospel to Ethiopia, by the sudden conversion of a great personage of the court of Queen Candace,

through the preaching of Philip, Acts ix. 26—38. Many ridicule *sudden conversions*; but it will be found a blessed reality to this present day, that the *truly converted*, in general, can remember the time when, the place where, and the person by whom they were first called into marvellous light, and received the saving knowledge of their crucified Lord. The herd of Christians who look to the parish register for the date of their christianity, are to be pitied for their ignorance; and those still more, who as blind lead the blind, and teach that the water of baptism which sprinkles the infant, is all the regeneration he needs.

Hitherto the Gospel Church had been confined within the Jewish pale, nor had the solitary instance of Cornelius, astonishing as it appeared, that on the Gentiles also the Holy Ghost should be poured out, enlarged the ideas of the Apostles to expect, that on the heathen at large the light of Christ should shine. The miraculous conversion of Paul, Acts ix. produced no alteration in this behalf. Though he preached boldly at Damascus the moment his eyes were opened, it was only in the synagogues of the Jews, v. 29, and many years elapsed in labours in Arabia, Jerusalem, Tarsus, Damascus and Antioch, before he received his commission at his second visit to Jerusalem as an Apostle to the heathen; and learned by an express revelation from his blessed Lord, that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in the Gospel.

OF THE GENTILE CHURCHES.

The Gentile Churches were chiefly formed by the labours of Paul, and the itinerant Evangelists, his companions.

At Antioch a great number of persons had believed and turned to the Lord, Gentile proselytes as well as native Jews, through the ministry of those who had been driven from Jerusalem, Acts xi. 19. This intelligence reaching the Apostles, Barnabas was dispatched to strengthen their hands. The work exceedingly increasing, he resolved to go to Tarsus, and engage Paul as his associate; and their united labours were crowned with singular success. There first, the disciples, distinguished by their zeal and numbers, received the honored, shall I say, or reproachful name of *Christians*. The Greek word *(Chrēmatisai,*)* Acts xi. 26, seems to intimate that the appellation was from Heaven; but if their enemies gave it them as a term of reproach, they bound it as a diadem to their brow, and gloried to be called after the name, as to resemble the image, of their Lord.

The necessities of the poor, the persecuted, and numerous saints at Jerusalem, led Barnabas and Paul thither with liberal contributions from Antioch. They could not but feel their obligations to those from whom all their spiritual blessings flowed. This was the tribute, not to superior dominion, or the exaction of authority, but the voluntary oblation of fraternal love, and the genuine

* Obtain or acquire.

expression of communion, with their afflicted and suffering brethren, Acts xi. 28. And they received a rich reward, for now the divine commission issued to level all distinction between Jew and Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free. Returning therefore to Antioch, the scene of their labours, the word of God under their ministry ran and had free course, and was glorified, Acts xii. 24.

The *Church of Antioch*, Acts xiii. 1, is represented as *one* body, immense as the converts were, and favoured with Evangelists as numerous as eminent, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. These surely cannot be supposed to have employed all their labours in the *same congregation*, and much less to have been joint-pastors of a *single church*. I am rather induced to think, that *many* congregations were raised, though in the unity of *one* church.

But now the blessed time was come for a more general and glorious communication of the Gospel to the Gentile world. It was no easy matter to break through Jewish prejudices. The Holy Ghost therefore especially commanded to separate Paul and Barnabas for the particular work, to which he had appointed them, Acts xiii. 3. These with proper assistants immediately issued forth in the name of the Lord; and in a vast circle through Seleucia, Cyprus, Paphos, Perga, Antioch in Pisidia, abundantly enlarged the pale of the Christian Church by their indefatigable labours. They chiefly at first confined themselves to the bounda-

ries of the synagogue ; yet collected thither a numerous audience of Gentile proselytes, ch. xiii. 43. The envy and enmity of the Jews burned like fire ; they could not bear to see the whole city assembled to hear the word of God. Contradicting and blaspheming, they sought to prejudice the multitude against Paul and Barnabas ; whilst they, waxing bolder, v. 46. under the persecution, solemnly took their leave of those, who, rejecting the word of truth, counted themselves unworthy of eternal life, and openly avowed their purpose henceforth of devoting themselves to the service of their Gentile brethren.

The storm of bigot fury now broke upon them. The Jews instigated the rulers and their own devotees, to expel them from their territories : whilst Paul and Barnabas left behind them the dust of their feet, to witness against their persecutors ; and a multitude of disciples filled with joy and the Holy Ghost, to be their crown and glory in the day of the Lord Jesus, v. 52.

The same success, and the same bitterness of Jewish malice attended them at Iconium, ch. xiv. 1. Awhile they firmly maintained their stand, v. 3. till enmity being roused to violence, a meditated assault to stone them compelled their removal to Derbe and Lystra, and the adjacent parts of Lycaonia, which by this means enjoyed the preaching of the Gospel-word—The wrath of man shall praise thee. Persecution often tends to spread the truth it meant to destroy. Here the miracle of the impotent man's cure, exposed them to a scene of

intended honor, more terrible than all their reproaches; but where the heart is unrenewed, those who were ready to worship them one day, are instigated to murder them the next. The same inveterate Jews pursued them from Antioch and Iconium to Lystra, stoned the venerable Paul, and left him for dead; (Acts xiv. 29.) but his work was not done, and till then he was immortal. A miraculous restoration to life and soundness, enabled him to depart for Derbe, to plant a new church there; and then undismayed, to return through the former scenes of his sufferings, confirming the faithful called by his ministry, and providing for their edification comfort and stability, by ordaining *elders in every church* with prayer and fasting. (Acts xiv. 23.) Returning through Pisidia and Attalia, they arrived happily at Antioch, communicating the glad tidings of their success, and of the Gentile Churches, which they had planted. I can only observe here, that I find, in all these widely dispersed and numerous congregations, no mention made of any appointment but that of *presbyters*, all cemented in one bond of union, under the supervisal of the great itinerant Evangelists.

The contention raised at Antioch by the Judaizing Christians, (Acts xv. 1.) compelled Barnabas and Paul to go up to Jerusalem, in order to consult with the Apostles and Elders on this important question, Whether Gentile Churches and Converts from the Heathen, were still bound by the Mosaical institutions? At Jerusalem the cause

was solemnly discussed before James, who presided, and all the other apostles, elders, and brethren, and according to the unanimous suffrage of the assembly, James pronounced a definitive decree in favour of Gentile liberty from the yoke of bondage. The letter directed, (Acts xv. 27.) in the name of the Apostles, Elders, and Brethren, to the Church of Antioch, for ever settled the controversy. Thus often unforeseen good arises from evil intentions frustrated.

Though James was not superior to Peter or the other Apostles, at Jerusalem, he had been evidently appointed to fill the place of president as *primus inter pares*. Yet, neither he, nor any of his apostolic associates, assumed to themselves authority to decide, but by the suffrage of the whole body of the Church, under immediate divine direction. All arrogant pretensions of a few to lord it over their brethren, were then unknown.

The report of the conversion of the Gentiles, caused great joy in all the churches and to all the brethren, as Paul and Barnabas passed to Jerusalem; whilst the decree, which they carried back to Antioch, afforded singular satisfaction and consolation to the Gentile converts. After a considerable stay at this favoured city, Paul and Barnabas planned a new excursion to visit the churches which they had planted, and to increase their numbers; when a trivial dispute, wrought up into passion, ended in a breach, which separated them for awhile (Acts xv. 39) but probably the Lord over-ruled this also for good, and the churches

were more profited by their distinct labours, than if they had travelled in one company. It is beautiful to observe the fidelity with which the sacred historians relate the faults of the greatest and best of men. The treasure is in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be seen to be of God, and not of us.

Paul seems to have been in the right in his objections to Mark, however his warmth might be faulty; and to have gone forth with the particular approbation of the brethren; and to *his* travels, Luke the historian, his companion, confines himself. Syria and Cilicia were first visited by him, confirming *the churches*, Acts xv. 41. Derbe and Lystra were next blessed with his labours; and Timothy, a favoured spiritual child of the Apostle, chosen for his travelling companion. Being a Jew on his mother's side, Paul circumcised him, in order, it seems, to render him more acceptable, or less obnoxious at least to the Jewish brethren. Of his conduct in this matter, I have feared, whether it may not be placed to the account of a too worldly compliance. Paul was a man like others, compassed with infirmities; probably the first of human beings, but still of like passions with his fellows.

By this visitation the churches were established, and increased in number daily, Acts xvi. 5. None had yet claimed a monopoly, or supposed the church in the next town and village to be less a true Church of Christ than themselves. They were hitherto all *one in Christ Jesus*.

Phrygia, and the regions of Galatia, afforded a plenteous harvest, and were filled with flourishing churches. And now God, who is sovereign and the guide of all our steps, defeated their own intentions, and in a vision directed them to a new scene of labours and usefulness. They therefore crossed the sea to Greece ; and Philippi, the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a Roman colony, arrested their attention. There Lydia was their first-fruits ; and when some interested masters, of a pythonic or fortune-telling damsel, in resentment for the loss they sustained, (Acts xvi. 19.) excited the multitude, and denounced them to the magistrates ; the ill usage which they received, and the prison to which they were committed, only served to turn the house of the jailor into a little Bethel, by the wondrous and instantaneous conversion of himself and all his household.

The Epistle, shortly after written to this Church, shews it to have consisted of *many congregations*, furnished with *bishops* and *deacons:* Phil. i. 1. The Epistle to the Galatians is addressed to the *Churches*, probably on a similar model. Our ideas are delusive when we suppose *primitive churches* have a resemblance to more modern ones. Pride, power, and pre-eminence, had not yet shed their baneful influence over these apostolic congregations ; and though superiority of gifts, zeal, and usefulness, must ever have raised some above their fellows, they only became more eminent examples to the flock, instead of assuming dominion over their brethren. It is evident the bishops at Phi-

lippi, and in the churches of Galatia, could only have had the superintendance and care of a very small flock. Philippi itself not being the metropolis even of a little province, the Christians in it could bear but a small proportion to the whole. They were generally also of the poorer sort, though no church manifested nobler liberality than the Philippians, sending once and again to the relief of Paul while in prison. Their bishops therefore must have been confined to a very restricted sphere; nor could it be otherwise, if the bishop attended to the minutest transactions of the church over which he presided: examined the catechumens, held the love-feasts, and knew intimately every member of his flock.

Paul's character, as a Roman citizen, being now discovered, procured his discharge from the gaol of Philippi, at the request of the magistrates who had committed him, but who began to fear being called to account for the illegal abuse of their power; expressing no resentment of his ill-usage, he took his leave of the brethren and departed. Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica, successively shared his labours. The latter place appears to have eminently profited by his preaching; and, as was usually the case, his success exasperated his Jewish enemies, and a tumult drove him to Berea by night, to escape his persecutors.

The church formed at *Thessalonica* he salutes in two Epistles, addressed generally *to all the holy brethren*, without any distinction of persons; nor is there the least mention of any church-rulers in

either of the Epistles. We may conclude, indeed, that in this capital of Macedonia, he ordained, as in other churches, presbyters or bishops, (1 Thess. v. 12.) names that at first appear to have been synonymous, as the most elderly persons were usually preferred to be the overseers of the flock, and the teachers of their younger brethren. The high commendation given of the exemplariness of this church, speaks to their honor; and the tender concern expressed for them, 1st. Epist. Thess. ch. iii. 6. marks how near they lay on the Apostle's heart.

BEREA next received the Gospel; and their noble candor in the search of the Scriptures, was crowned with a divine conviction of the truth, and a numerous host of converts; but the same enmity being there excited by his inveterate enemies the Jews, Paul was sent off secretly to Athens to wait the arrival of his less obnoxious brethren, who probably tarried behind to put their church matters in the usual order for edification, before they joined the Apostle.

His ardent spirit could not but be moved at the gross idolatry he beheld; and his conscious superiority challenged the conflict with the proud philosophers; and even confounded the Areopagites, leaving some solid proofs of his short ministry, in that seat of learning and the muses; but it was at Corinth, whither he next migrated, that the Lord, having *much people*, sent one to call them out of darkness into marvellous light. The amaz-

ing progress of the Gospel, encouraged a long continuance of his ministry there. Soon driven from the synagogue, the Gentiles welcomed him, and a plenteous harvest crowned his labours. That heathen wilderness budded and blossomed as the rose.

To this flourishing church we have two Epistles; great gifts adorned them, but great divisions were introduced by false brethren; and great offences afforded much scandal to the Christian world. To correct, to reform, to rebuke, to instruct, to edify, appears the Apostle's object. The first Epistle is addressed to the *Church* at Corinth, with all that in every place call on the Lord Jesus. The second includes *the saints which are in all Achaia*, who probably constituted a part of the same body. Their power to judge their own members is suggested, ch. iv. 12; and their obligation to excommunicate impenitent transgressors enforced, v. 15. Every church had a right to exercise discipline, to admonish, to censure, or expel from the society of the faithful. Anti-christian pains and penalties of spiritual courts were yet unknown.

All the members were to join in *communion*, ch. x. 25. after self-examination, v. 28. I see no trace of a written or oral experience delivered to the congregation. This is the commandment of men; a creditable conversation is all the Church can demand. It is his own damnation if a man eats and drinks unworthily; and such there were among them, v. 30.

In this church it appears that *all* might preach and prophecy, ch. xiv. 24; and it is evident by the effects produced on strangers who came in during their worship, that some were convinced and converted hereby. This, therefore, being so desirable an object, a wise regulation is enjoined respecting the preachers; that they seek the edifying of the Church, and speak to be understood, ch. xiv. 12; but if one uses a tongue not generally known, another must interpret it to the audience; and if there be no interpreter he must be silent, v. 28. Thus two or three at every act of worship may instruct, whilst the rest sit by and judge, v. 29. so that at different times, *all one by one*, may communicate and receive edification, v. 31, no church-ruler appears to controul this liberty, nor his license asked. And I can see no scriptural reason or injunction to hinder *any man*, with the approbation of the congregation, from speaking for their instruction. The exclusion of women, v. 34, from becoming public teachers, seems to admit the right of any man who is qualified and approved; and this qualification every Christian brother, v. 39, should covet earnestly to obtain. Origen, when a layman, thus preached even before bishops, in the third century.

The churches of Galatia, are proposed, ch. xvi. 1. as a model for the Corinthians. A weekly sum, according to every man's income or success in business is enjoined, to be laid aside for charitable uses; a practice highly laudable, and worthy the observation of all churches, and every member of them.

Stephanas and his household, having devoted themselves to the ministry, are commended to their regard: and Timothy, v. 10. who was then itinerating.

The Epistle appears dated at Ephesus, and not Philippi, as our postscript supposes; nor does it seem to have been sent by Timothy, who was travelling, but by some other person.

Aquila and Priscilla then resided at Ephesus; and wherever they abode, opened their house for worship, and had a church therein.

The second Epistle contains little relative to church-order. Titus (ch. vii. 6.) appears to have been with the Apostle at Philippi, and not a resident at Crete, his supposed diocese, any more than Timothy at Ephesus. They were itinerant Evangelists, who went about preaching every where. On Paul the general superintendence of the Gentile churches lay. Ch. xi. 27. Peter's peculiar charge was the circumcision, Gal. ii. 7.

But to return to Paul's travels:

From Corinth Paul took shipping for Syria, and himself observant of the Jewish ceremonies not yet vanished away, had shorn his head at Cenchrea, having a vow. And hastily passing through Ephesus, he proceeded by Cæsarea to Jerusalem, and thence to Antioch. After some stay in that favoured place, he revisited the churches of Galatia and Phrygia, and returned to Ephesus, where the eloquent Apollos had found instructors in Paul's

companions, Aquila and Priscilla, and after profiting that church by his labours, passed to Corinth, to water the seed sown by the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

At Ephesus, Paul continued about two years, spreading the Gospel through all Asia: first addressing his Jewish brethren, and being by them rejected, he removed to the school-room of one Tyrannus, probably a Gentile convert, and there taught with power and demonstration of the Spirit, the truth as it is in Jesus. Many miracles were wrought by him, and wonderful effects produced by his ministry, (Acts xix. 19.) in so much that the craftsmen perceiving the famed Diana's temple greatly deserted, and their gains diminished, raised a tumult, from which Paul was preserved by the prudence of his friends; and the consequences that were apprehended prevented by the wisdom of the town-clerk. Yet as the place was become too dangerous to abide there, he departed again for Macedonia, distant from this seat of disorder; and passing through Greece, where he had before planted the Gospel, after three months stay he returned to Syria, through Macedonia, accompanied by a variety of friends attached to him; and his fellow-helpers in the work. From Philippi he embarked for Troas. There after a few days stay, and the miraculous recovery of Eutycus, he walked to Assos, where his companions took him on board, and sailed to Mitylene; and after passing visits at Samos and Trogyllium, he arrived at Miletus. Thither he summoned the Elders of

the Ephesian Church, and after a solemn and affecting charge, took his last farewell.

To this Church was addressed that heavenly epistle, which is still extant, directed *to all the Saints and faithful in Christ Jesus*, it is equally applicable to them in the present, as in the primitive days. One thing in the constitution of that church, strongly marks the titles of presbyters and bishops, as there synonymous; that he charges the elders to be watchful of the flock, over which the Holy Ghost had made them bishops, Acts xx. 28. I cannot avoid observing, that he can be no presbyter or bishop, whom the Holy Ghost has not made such. No appointment of man can make him a minister of the sanctuary, whom GOD the Spirit hath not inwardly moved, and consecrated for his own work.

The different titles under which the ministers of the church are distinguished, ch. iv. 11, 12. give no precise view of their character or numbers. He mentions Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers, all active for the edifying the body of Christ. But what was the appropriate work of each is not explicitly declared.

A prophetic impression, that he should see Rome, (Acts xix, 21.) was accomplished now in a way that he knew not. No warnings could deter him from visiting Jerusalem. Having sailed from Miletus to Coos, Rhodes and Patara, he landed at Tyre, and from thence went by Cæsarea to Jerusalem. There, in compliance with James's recom-

mendation, he was fulfilling a part of the Mosaic ritual, respecting vows, in order to shew that he continued to observe the law. Whether he owed it such a compliance, I have ever doubted ; this, and his circumcising Timothy, have appeared to me temporising. But Paul probably is right, and I am wrong. The Jews of Asia observing him in the temple, pretended profanation, and raised that commotion, which, after all the danger to which he became exposed in his seizure, imprisonment, and lying in wait of the Jews, compelled him, after a long confinement, in which he found no justice would ever be done him in Judea, to claim his privilege as a Roman citizen, and appeal to the hearing of Augustus.

His apology to the people, his defence before Felix, his beautiful discourse to Agrippa and his court, all speak a language that cannot be read without admiration and sensibility. His voyage to Rome, disastrous in the highest degree, afforded a noble evidence of his courage and composure ; and to him God gave all who sailed with him in the ship, who owed their escape from the shipwreck to his counsels, and the care and keeping of his covenant God. Wherever he went he communicated blessings, and displayed the miraculous powers with which he was invested. Melita had reason to bless God for his arrival, and for the benefits conferred on the bodies and souls of its inhabitants, Acts xxviii. And when at last his voyage terminated at Rome, he was received with the reverence and affection for which his epistle

had paved the way; and in which is left a golden treasure to the Church of Christ, that will communicate blessings to the latest ages, greater than those enjoyed even by the persons to whom it was immediately addressed.

Vast and momentous as the contents of this epistle are in every view, I cannot discover a trace respecting the outward regimen of the church: and as little can I glean from the epistle to the Collossians: The persons addressed are *the saints and faithful brethren in Christ*. Epaphras, one of their teachers, is entitled our dear fellow labourer and faithful minister in Christ. And the congregation to which Archippus ministered, is enjoined to watch over him, and remind him of his duty. Clerical dominion had not yet entered into any man's idea. And nothing can more decisively prove the small importance of the mode of church government than that so little mention is made of it, and so little can precisely be ascertained from all the epistles. We shall see that the spirit and temper with which the ministers of Christ must be endued, are most explicitly described. Their titles, names, or authority, are of trivial import compared with their devotedness, heavenly mindedness, and readiness to spend and be spent in the service of their faith.

His two favoured sons, Timothy and Titus, were his chief companions, and greatly employed by him in the regulation of the congregations, which had been raised by his labours; as well as to resist

the *judaizing* teachers, who were the constant disturbers of the peace of the Gentile churches. *The* postscript of the first Epistle, calls Timothy the first Bishop of the Church of the Ephesians; but there is no such title given him by Paul, nor any intimation of his being at Ephesus; but as one of the great itinerant Evangelists, the companion of Paul, and deputed by him to assist in bringing the congregations into a regular order for worship and discipline.

From the 2d Chap. 1st. Epist. I collect, that prayers, supplication and intercession for all men, and especially for kings and magistrates, were to be offered up—no form is prescribed. This seems to be left to the minister, only that those who preach and pray be *good men*, and that women be excluded from public ministrations.

It is supposed, (ch. iii) that it was a lawful and good work to desire the office of a bishop; so much labor, danger, self-denial, and exemplariness of conduct, being necessarily attached to it, and every earthly consideration renounced by those who addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints. Had Timothy been a bishop of the Church of Ephesus, as asserted, the encouragement given to others to devote themselves to episcopal services there, manifests a state of episcopacy very different from what we find at present generally established. The bishops here spoken of, were evidently the elders of congregations, (see Tit. i. 5. compared with v. 7) who, by ruling well their own houses,

had given satisfactory evidence of their ability to preside in the Church of God. Their qualifications are clearly and strongly described, (chap. iii. 8—11) and deserve the most solemn attention of every minister of Christ, whatever station he may fill.

It is evident Timothy was still but a youth, (chap. iv. 12) and whatever office he sustained, or with whatever gifts endued, he recieved them by the laying on of Paul's hands and of the presbytery, 1 Tim. iv. 14. Did presbyters then ordain bishops? or, were the terms synonymous? That he was left at Ephesus, with superintending authority, where there were *many bishops*, is evident, 1 Tim. i. 3. He was enjoined to encourage and honour those who presided over the congregations well; and especially such as were most active and laborious in preaching and catechising, (v. 18) Respecting ordination, he was to lay hands hastily on no man, and without partiality or personal respect admit none into the ministry but after proper examination and conviction of their call and qualifications. He was also cautiously to receive, and impartially to weigh accusations against elders who should give public offence, and pronounce the censure due to their unfaithfulness. Acts strongly marking superior jurisdiction; and I hence infer, that particular churches neither ordained nor censured their own ministers, though they elected and recommended; and, if faulty, accused them by two or three witnesses, before the great itinerant Evangelists.

Paul's first imprisonment at Rome continued two whole years; but he escaped out of the jaws of the lion, Nero, and left a blessed manifestation of his bonds in the palace, as well as in every other place. In his second Epistle to Timothy he appears returned again to the house of his prison at Rome, and ready to be offered up on the altar of martyrdom. He had detached his faithful itinerant helpers to a variety of services—Crescens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia, whilst Timothy himself had been left in Asia, from whence he was shortly to proceed to Rome with Mark, who had once departed from the work, but now had returned to the labors and dangers of itinerancy. The principal subject of the Epistle is the dying charge of the great Apostle to his beloved son, respecting his own teaching and conduct, and worthy the most attentive consideration of every bishop or presbyter upon earth.

Titus, next to Timothy, seems to have been peculiarly dear to Paul, and one of his most laborious assistants. He traversed the vast regions, where, by the labors of the Apostle and his companions, churches had been formed, in order to compleat the regulations generally established, and to ordain in the several congregations such as were qualified for the sacred ministry, according to the apostolic description, chap. i. 6, 8;—men of the best report and most exemplary conduct, of which the church to which they belonged must necessarily be the most competent judges. These *presbyters*, v. 5. are called *bishops*, 5, 7; their

office and qualifications being apparently the same. But though this trust is committed to Titus, it no where appears that he was himself more the Bishop of Crete than of Dalmatia, (2 Tim. iv. 10) or of Nicopolis, (Tit. iii. 12) nor had any fixed residence or diocese, he being one of the great itinerant Evangelists who went about preaching *every where*, in season, out of season. And therefore, as soon as he had settled the Cretan Church in the most edifying manner, he was ordered to come and winter with Paul at Nicopolis, and Artemas or Tychicus should be dispatched to fill his place in the Cretan congregations.

A general superiority in all the churches, which they visited, appears to have been exercised by these great Evangelists, though none appear stationary in any one place. They ordained, censured, regulated, were the cementing bond of the different churches, maintaining a unity of order and procedure through the whole. They all bore the name of Apostles, (2 Cor. viii. 23) were every where received with reverence, and obeyed with filial affection. They assumed no dominion over the faith, but were helpers of the joy of the faithful wherever they went. The gifts, abilities, zeal, which they displayed, with every divine temper which adorns the Christian ministry, could not but give them weight, and procure them eminence, by whatever name they might be distinguished ; and in every Christian church, in the very nature of things, such men must possess superiority, whatever be its constitution. Even

where the most absolute parity is established, to these their fellows naturally give place. They are the presidents in all associations; heard with respect, commanding obedience; capable of swaying the decisions of their brethren; consulted in all difficult circumstances; and placed foremost in the hour of danger. To them is entrusted the care of eleemosynary distributions, for the benefit of the body to which they belong; and in private and public all cede to them the seat of honor. If we considered *things* instead of *names*, we should have less dispute and more union. There are bigots in all denominations of Christians. Tyranny and intolerance ecclesiastical, are in every church the mark of the beast; but wherever union and order are best maintained, there ever were, and ever will be, call them by what title you please, men superior to their fellows in office, and admitted to be so. In the primitive Church this superiority vested in the apostles and their companions, the great itinerant Evangelists, Barnabas, Silas, Artemas, Tychicus, Trophimus, Titus, Timothy, and many others; *chief men among the brethren.*

In all the directions given throughout this epistle, the regulations of Titus's personal conduct and ministrations form the principal subject, and exactly correspond with those given to Timothy. Indeed it could hardly be otherwise, men placed in similar situations were called to act under the same principles, and to employ the same means.

The short epistle to Philemon was written on account of Onesimus, his slave, who had deserted

his service, and is supposed to have robbed his master. Coming to Rome, like London the sink and receptacle of all wickedness and those who need concealment, he there, in the mysterious ways of Providence, was led to hear the Apostle Paul, whom probably he had seen at his master's house. Curiosity most probably incited him to attend his prison preaching; and being now effectually called and converted to God, he devoted himself to Paul's service. But however much he needed so assiduous an attendant, the Apostle judged it right to send him back to Colosse, his master's residence; and Onesimus readily returned to make the surrender of himself to Philemon's discretion. The only trait respecting the Church contained in this letter, is the intimation that it was assembled under Philemon's roof, and edified by his ministry and that of Archippus, whom Paul honors as *his fellow soldier*, united with him in the care and superintendance of the same congregation. He expresses his hope of shortly visiting Philemon, when released from his present confinement, and bespeaks himself a lodging with his spiritual child, v. 22.

Thus have I collected, as far as I know, with simplicity and truth, without bias or partiality to any of our present modes of church government, whatever the Scripture contains respecting the regulation of the Gentile Churches under Paul's especial care, chiefly planted by his labours, and watered by his word and his epistles.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, though not bearing his express subscription, is generally adjudged to

be his. A single sentence (ch. xiii. 7) inculcating obedience and love towards those who have the *rule* over them, and have spoken unto them the word of God, is all I can find relative to church government; and at least affords a negative proof of how little importance the outward forms and administration in the church are, compared with holding the head Christ, and believing the glory of his person and sacrifice. If the unfounded idea that Bishops, Priests and Deacons, were ever to succeed to the High-Priest, Priests and Levites, here surely we must have found some intimation of it. That men of research can broach such puerilities is surprising.

The other epistles are equally barren on this subject. That of James, addressed to his Jewish brethren throughout the world, is wholly employed in practical directions, without a word on the nature of the Gospel Churches or their government. The elders are only once mentioned as praying over the sick, chap. v. 14. Indeed I am fully assured, if we walked more closely with God, and were more deeply concerned about our personal salvation in the exercise of faith working by love, and prompting to every good word and work, we should be much less bigotted to modes and forms. A truly gracious man will be much more attentive to the *building*, that he may be the habitation of God through the spirit, than to the *scaffolding*. In every church, Lutheran or Reformed, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or Independent, it is of infinitely more moment for every member of

each to "prove that he is born of God," and to feel that his Spirit witnesseth with our spirits, that we are the children of God, than to which of these denominations of Christians we may be joined in outward church-fellowship.

The epistles of Peter directed to the Gentile converts, (1 Eph. chap. ii. 10) enter little or nothing into the subject of church government, forms, or officers. The first of them is wholly employed in the great object of setting forth Jesus Christ and his glorious salvation, and in building up the souls of the faithful on him, the sure foundation, other than which no man can lay. I enter not into the particulars contained in this epistle; wishing only to recommend an attentive perusal of Archbishop Leighton's Commentary, as one of the books, which next to the sacred oracles themselves, breathes a language most highly congenial with the text it elucidates. One verse or two only deserves to be noticed. (1 Eph. ch. v. 12) In this, Peter claims no precedence or priority above his fellows, satisfied with announcing his own office and character, as himself a *presbyter*; addressing his brethren under the same title as *presbyters*, and exhorting them as his fellow-labourers to discharge their *episcopal* duty towards the several flocks over whom the Holy Ghost had made them overseers, not by consent but willingly; not for filthy lucre sake, but of a ready mind; not affecting lordly dominion over their allotted congregations, but being examples of the flock. Then when the Arch-pastor should appear, an amaranthine crown

of glory would be their full reward. He well knew the human heart, and how much need the greatest and best of men had to be cautioned against the one, and to be exhorted to the other. The fatal effects of neglecting these admonitions have been since sufficiently experienced.

The second epistle, still more general in its address, (chap. i. 1) hath not a word relative to the subject of church government; like its very similar epistle of Jude, it contains solemn warnings against seducers and false teachers, who (such is the corruption of man) even in those early days had insinuated themselves into the assemblies of the saints. With the most lively exhortations he urges them to live as men who expected the coming of their Lord, and to walk so as we have him for our example; because he can belong to no church, and much less have any pretensions to be a minister of Christ, who is not a partaker of the like precious faith with us; whose effects in mortification of sin, deadness to the world, and diligence to make our calling and election sure, must prove its reality, and demonstrate that our Christianity is not in word and in tongue, but in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.

The works of one eminent, inspired man, remain to be considered, in reference to this subject. His extended life must have nearly closed the century. He was a confessor, and perhaps a martyr. His epistles, like his gospel, are designed to display the glory of him which was from the beginning. Having imbibed from him the spirit of love, he

inculcates this essential proof of discipleship; and that we should manifest to others, and enjoy ourselves, the certain assurance, that we are of God; and that we dwell in him, and he in us by his Spirit, which he hath given us. In his second and third epistles, he assumes no higher title than the *presbyter:* The *Church*, of which he makes repeated mention, appears to have been one of those house-congregations, over which Diotrephes had assumed dominion, expelling from it (v. 10) those itinerant brethren who travelled about preaching the Gospel; whom Gaius had kindly received, but Diotrephes treated them with abuse; reviling the Apostle John himself, who had sent them, and using his influence to make a party in the Church, and prevent others who would have welcomed them from entertaining them. The Apostle declares his intention severely to animadvert on such a conduct at his next visit, and not leave his insolence unrebuked; probably, like many a purse-proud professor since, his wealth and weight in the church overawed the members, and no one dared openly resist what many in secret condemned.

The last work of this great Apostle, the Revelation communicated to him in the Isle of Patmos, and transmitted by him to the Asiatic Churches, will close the canon of Scripture, and finish the records of Divine authority. The inspired penman is directed to send these words of warning to the seven Asiatic Churches in particular; and assumes no other title, than *your brother and com-*

panion in tribulation. The several churches are addressed in the person of their *Angel*, which is a term of office, signifying messenger. These angels, or messengers of the churches, were to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation to the people. When any matters relative to their church required advice or correction, they were sent to consult Paul or the other Apostles, and were often employed by him (2 Cor. viii. 23) to regulate what was amiss. In these awful epistles contained in the book of the Revelations, the great Head of the Church encourages, commands, exhorts the faithful, and threatens *himself* to inflict deserved punishment on the refractory and disobedient. The angel denounces the warnings of his Lord; the arbitrary impositions and punishments of men had yet found no place in the Church of God; to exhort, reprove, rebuke with all long suffering and doctrine, was all that angels were empowered to do.

Thus, to the best of my ability, I have endeavoured plainly and fully to place in view the scriptural account of the nature and administration of the Church of Christ, as drawn from the sacred source of unerring truth. I am perfectly sure, I neither mean or desire intentionally the least misrepresentation or concealment, but earnestly pray to follow the simplicity which is in Christ; and divested of partiality and predilection, to describe, and be united with the true church of the living God.

Had the *mode* of Church government been as essential to salvation, as the doctrine of the atone-

ment, or the agency of the Holy Ghost, it would assuredly have been as explicitly stated: but, when we find it so little expressly defined—the subject treated in so indistinct and cursory a manner—when so little stress appears to be laid upon it—and when men equally wise and good, after investigating the matter with singular ability and diligence, remain still of different opinions, I trust we may safely conclude, that the claims of mutual forbearance are infinitely stronger than the pretensions of any *exclusive church*. That the *outward administration* of church order must be a much less important concern, than all our various denominations have supposed—and, that the *inward blessings* enjoyed in the conscience, constitute the essence, and fill the volume of the sacred records. Every believer in Jesus, who is a partaker of the grace of God in truth, is a member of the true Church, to whatever particular denomination of Christians he may belong; and popes, bishops, presbyters, pastors or deacons, without this are but the limbs of Antichrist, and of the synagogue of Satan; and can belong to no church which the great Shepherd and Bishop of Souls will acknowledge for his own.

To sum up in a few words a subject which has been so fearfully abused, in order to subserve the purposes of pride, bigotry, and worldly-mindedness, I conclude.

1. That as soon as a little society was formed of Christian men, a room was opened for their assembling, and the most apt to teach appointed to minister to them in holy things.

2. He was a man of gravity, generally of the more aged, married, and having a family, approved by his fellows, and willing to devote himself to their service.

3. His appointment was signified by prayer and imposition of hands of the Apostle Paul, or some of the itinerant Evangelists, and the presbytery; and without this I meet no ordination.

4. Every church exercised discipline over its own members, to admit, admonish, or expel.

5. Before these itinerant Evangelists all accusations against offending presbyters, were brought. They, in conjunction with the congregation, regulated matters of order, and corrected abuses.

6. These seem not to have had any appropriate district, but went about *every where*, chiefly under the direction of the Apostle Paul.

7. These great Evangelists were usually supported by the churches; but often, like Paul, maintained themselves by their own labours. During the first ages, the ministry was not appropriated to gentlemen or scholars. No man was bred to it as a profession, or went into it for a maintenance. They were pastors of a different stamp.

8. The stationary presbyters or bishops, during the lives of the Apostle and his associate Evangelists, were under their superintendence. But it

will appear very early in the second century, when this first race of great itinerants departed, that one among the ministers in every place began to have the name of *bishop (kat exochēn*)* with presbyters his coadjutors, acting with him as one body.

9. All ecclesiastical officers from the beginning, and for the first three hundred years, were elected by the people. Even Mathias was thus chosen to fill up the tribular number of the Apostles.

10. Deacons were instituted for the care of the poor, especially the widows; and deaconesses afterwards appear for the same purposes, though their institution is not expressly marked in the sacred canon. Originally they were ordained not for one congregation, but for the myriads at Jerusalem, whose widows were provided for out of a common stock.

Lastly. *Every* member of the primitive Church seems to have made it a constant practice to lay aside weekly, a certain portion of his income or gains, for the poor, the persecuted, or the Gospel, according to his ability; and hence, though generally the Christians were of the lowest and most indigent class of the people, the riches of their liberality abounded, and their means for this arose from their Christian character itself. Their *industry* was great, and they wasted nothing in *extravagance* of any kind, being by principle self-denied

* On account of pre-eminence.

to all indulgences for themselves, that they might have *to* give to him that needed. And if all real Christians more conscientiously observed this rule still, it is amazing what a fund might be raised for the relief of the necessitous, and the furtherance of the Gospel.

CHAPTER V.

THE PERSECUTIONS MENTIONED IN THE SCRIPTURE.

THESE were principally from the Jews, and the reason of this is evident; for, in Judea, the principal civil magistrates, as well as the high priest and church rulers, were Jews: and where the concurrence of the Roman governors was necessary, they had generally influence to engage them to act according to their wishes. Thus even Pilate was prevailed upon, contrary to his own convictions, to condemn our Lord to death; and Felix, though fully convinced of Paul's innocence, when he quitted the province, in order to obtain favor with the Jews, left Paul in chains, and in prison.

As at first, for many years the Christian ministry was confined to the Jews and the synagogue: Christians, who diligently observed the Mosaic ritual, could not be easily distinguished from their brethren, and would generally be considered as Jews by the heathen. But their peculiar observances—the declaration of their faith in Jesus of Nazareth—their observance of the first day of the week—and, above all, their zeal to propagate the doctrines of faith and salvation by Jesus Christ; with that distinguishing excellence and purity of conduct, which whilst it reproached those around

them, was accompanied with the most solemn warnings that they must perish or repent—all these things could not but engage the attention, and excite the enmity of their neighbours. Accordingly we see them presently exposed to bonds and imprisonment, to scourging and insult, on the first attempts to preach and teach Jesus Christ. The spoiling of their goods gratified the avarice as well as enmity of their persecutors; and Judea in consequence became the scene of great distress and poverty. This was relieved by a liberal distribution of what the more wealthy there possessed; and afterwards by most generous contributions from all the Gentile churches. We have information of many acts of violence committed, and there were many more, no doubt, which are not recorded. If Saul, breathing threatenings and slaughter, made such havock in the church, entering every house of Christians, and hauling men and women, committed them to prison, (Acts viii. 3) most probably others at Jerusalem copied his example. We know the zeal of Stephen exposed him to a cruel death. He led the noble army of martyrs. James succeeded him under Herod Agrippa; and Peter only escaped by miracle. Nor were distant cities exempt from the like persecutions, as is evident from the commission with which Saul was invested to Damascus.

Nor did the Roman government, however in its nature little disposed to persecute on account of religious matters, withhold its hand from violence; or properly discountenance the tumults and op-

pressions, which the Jewish zealots, the rabble multitude, and interested Pagans, were continually exercising against the Christians. From what is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, we may conclude what was the case in other places, where a like conduct would awaken the same enmity; and bonds and imprisonment await those who dared witness against false religion, or rebuke alike the wicked conduct of Jews and Gentiles.

The very nature of real Christianity, however peaceable in all its principles, cannot, through the corruption of man, but excite the strongest opposition; and, when we speak of peace, rouse all whom it reproves, to asperity and battle. And, where only weakness and non-resistance were on one side, and power equal to their malice and enmity on the other, it is impossible in the nature of things, but that the consequences should ensue which are recorded, and abundantly more than would be noticed, as the accounts of the sufferings in one place would be only the counterpart of the same in all others. And how widely the Christian faith was disseminated, no man can dispute. The sufferings and the martyrs, therefore, I conclude, were abundantly more numerous than any record has preserved. And the persecution of all that would live godly in Christ Jesus, great and universal.

CHAPTER VI.

HERESIES AND SCHISMS.

IT must be that offences come. Even during the days of the Apostles themselves, there were many Anti-christs—such are the dire effects of human corruption: and permitted, that those who are truly approved and faithful, may be made manifest.

The first and most continued cause of dispute in the Christian Church, was the error and bigotry of Jewish zealots, enforcing upon Christians the necessity of the observance of the Mosaic ritual, in order to salvation; and thereby sapping the foundations of *justification by faith alone*, that essential article of the true Church from the beginning. The conformity of the apostles and first disciples to the Jewish œconomy, from which, as circumcised, they did not think themselves emancipated, naturally gave a strong handle to those who were zealots for the ancient religious rites of their fathers, to suppose that they were binding upon all men; and that every Christian must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. The Acts of the Apostles—the Epistle to the Galatians, where these ideas had occasioned peculiar disputes and divisions—the same subject discussed in the Epistle to the Romans, and introduced almost into every one of

Paul's epistles, shew how far the evil had extended; how dangerous he esteemed it; and how carefully he guarded the Christian Church against it. And as good often arises eventually out of human corruption, to this we are chiefly indebted for the precise and clear views of gospel grace; of the glories of the redemption, which is in Jesus Christ; of the free justification of every sinner, as ungodly, *by faith only*, without any consideration of his works or deserts; and consequently the securing the praise of the salvation to him alone, who, by an obedience to death, even the death of the cross, hath obtained eternal redemption for us, and hath opened the kingdom of Heaven to all believers. The zeal, the warmth expressed in the ample discussions, into which the Apostle entered on this subject, are a conclusive evidence of its importance. After the most solemn consideration of the matter at Jerusalem, a decree issued to all the Gentile churches, containing the unanimous decision of the apostles, presbyters and brethren; condemning the disturbers of the Gentile churches; and the attempt to impose a yoke abrogated and unnecessary; recommending only in a few particulars, a conduct such as mutual charity dictated; in order to maintain a happier intercourse between the Jewish and Gentile Christians; approving of Barnabas and Paul, and the doctrine which they had taught; and adding to them Judas and Silas, who, in person and discourse, should confirm them in the truth, which these apostles of the Gentiles had maintained against the self-righteous and judaizing teachers.

Another cause of schismatical evil appeared also early, especially in the Corinthian Church, through personal attachment to particular men, and a degrading and reviling spirit towards others, to the disturbance of the peace of the faithful, and the great hindrance of the Gospel. A factious teacher, in the pride of pre-eminence, in order to exalt himself, debased his brethren, and often deceived the hearts of the simple and unwary, drawing away disciples after him; and weakening the hands of the Apostles themselves. Against these men, Paul especially guards them. But nothing herein can be applied to those who withdraw themselves from *false teachers*, whose doctrine is heretical, and whose lives are contrary to their holy profession; who have only taken the oversight of the flock for lucre; have neither the choice nor approbation of the faithful; and however they may maintain the form of godliness, deny the power of it: from such turn away. Separation from these men and their churches, is not schism but duty.

The doctrine of the resurrection of the body was one of the first great truths disputed by the reasoners in religious matters. Some affirming that there was no resurrection from the dead; and others, that it was past already; as if the doctrine was merely spiritual and allegorical, and related not to the reality and identity of the same body being raised from the grave. The matter is discussed and the heresy confuted, 2 Tim. ii. 18. 1 Cor. xv. passim.

John, who survived the rest of the Apostles, observes and censures other heresies lately broached in the church. Against the doctrines of the Nicolaitans, he gives a solemn caution, (Rev. ii. 15) This seems to have been an error of the same nature with that to which Paul often alludes, the introducing philosophical ideas to explain away Christian mysteries, especially respecting the person of God our Saviour—ascribing to speculative knowledge an imaginary value—making Christianity a religion of the head instead of the heart; and therefore supposing the profession of it compatible with a general conformity to the world and its manners; permitting the occasional participation of idol sacrifices, and other corrupt practices, in which the heathen indulged themselves.

In the ingenious volume of Ecclesiastical History, of the Rev. Mr. Newton, there is an admirable chapter on ancient heresies, and a noble defence of Evangelical truth against those, who in the present day endeavour to load with obloquy and abuse the revivers of Evangelical Doctrine. Had he pursued his work, it would have rendered my labours unnecessary. But the Church of God will never want defenders, and will always, and only be found, where the practice of righteousness and true holiness, the fruit of the faith once delivered to the Saints, demonstrates that her members stand not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

SECTION II.

END OF THE FIRST, AND COMMENCEMENT OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH, FROM THE CLOSE OF THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE, TILL THE END OF THE REIGN OF TRAJAN.

WE are stepping from the blaze of day into the regions of doubt and twilight. The moment we quit the Oracles of truth, we are left to grope our way through the feeble glimmerings of works, which have been handed down through a succession of ages; whose authenticity has been disputed by some, and which by more have been charged with interpolations; these, with traditionary reports, suspicious on account of the distorted medium through which they have passed, leave us under the necessity of treading every step with caution; examining with care, and as far as I can trust my convictions, obliged oftener to doubt than believe.

The Apostles are said to have dispersed after the first council held at Jerusalem. But I much ques-

tion whether the most of them did not live and die among their brethren in Palestine. Certainly the accounts given of some of them are little deserving of credit. We know they considered their ministry as chiefly if not wholly to be employed in the service of their Jewish brethren. On Paul and his associates, the care of all the Gentile churches rested.

It seems clear, by generally admitted evidence, that the Church of Christ had widely spread its conquests, and continued in a constant rapidly progressive state; nor hitherto to have suffered any general persecution from the Roman government. Probably the poverty of the primitive Christians was their protection, as affording little for the gratification of avarice. They were also at first confounded with the Jews, who enjoyed perfect toleration. They excited also the less the attention of government, as being of the lower order of men; not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, being called. Hence they were scarcely ever noticed by any author of that day. And when they are first mentioned, the account given of them shews how little acquaintance was gained of their character, or procedures. The reports of the Roman historians contain only the malignant abuse of ignorant slander.

The greatest number of Christians were in the cities, though they spread also into the adjacent villages. But their assemblies in any one place at first could not have been very numerous, except at

Jerusalem, as a single room in a private house usually contained them. They continued increasing through the indefatigable labours of the itinerant Evangelists, and by the zeal of many others, excited to activity in their several spheres, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God to all around them.

No sooner had Paul escaped out of the mouth of the lion, Nero, than he probably visited the churches, as his epistles intimate he intended to do. Returning again to Rome, whether as a prisoner of state, or seized on, during a visit to that church, he is supposed to have fallen in the first great massacre of the Christians under that bloody tyrant. This monster, raised up for the scourge of a guilty world, having for a while through the influence of his tutor Seneca, given auspicious hopes of his government, degenerated by degrees into the basest of beings and the cruelest of men. A vast conflagration at Rome in the tenth year of his reign, said to be kindled by his own order for the pleasure of gazing on the desolations which the flames would make, irritating the Roman people, he endeavoured to exculpate himself by casting the odium on the innocent Christians The account of the admirable historian Tacitus, however his own prejudices therein appear, affords a most valuable material for our history. Speaking of Nero, and the conflagration of Rome, he says, "To divert "suspicion from himself, he substituted fictitious "criminals, and with this view, he inflicted the "most exquisite tortures on those men who under

" the vulgar appellation of *Christians*, were already " *branded with deserved infamy*. They derived " their name and origin from CHRIST, who in the " reign of Tiberius had suffered death by the sen- " tence of the procurator, Pontius Pilate. For " awhile this *dire superstition* was checked ; but it " again burst forth ; and not only spread itself " over Judea, the first seat of this *mischievous sect*, " but was even introduced into Rome, the common " asylum which receives and protects whatever is " *impure and atrocious*. The confessions of those " who were seized, discovered *a great multitude* of " their accomplices, and *they were all convicted*, " not so much for the crime of setting fire to the " city, as for *their hatred of human kind*. They " died in torments ; and these were embittered by " insult and derision. Some were nailed on cross- " es, others sewn up in skins of wild beasts, and " exposed to the fury of dogs ; others again smear- " ed over with combustible materials, were used " as torches to illuminate the darkness of the " night. The gardens of Nero were destined for " the melancholy spectacle, which was accom- " panied by a horse race, and honored with the " presence of the Emperor, who mingled with the " populace in the dress and attitude of a charioteer. " *The guilt of the Christians deserved indeed the most* " *exemplary punishment*, but *the public abhorrence* " was changed into commiseration, from the " opinion that these unhappy wretches were sa- " crificed, not so much to the rigor of justice, as " to the cruelty of the jealous tyrant."

We cannot read this account without being struck with the multiplied and horrible executions, made of these innocent but devoted victims. Indeed, lying under such *public abhorrence* and *general odium*, as a sect *mischievous*, *impure*, *atrocious*; *branded* with *deserved infamy*; their *guilt* calling for the *most exemplary punishment*; it was impossible that the arm of vengeance should not be lifted up over them. I am amazed any man can admit the truth of these prepossessions against them, and afterwards suppose, as Gibbon does, that the executions were inconsiderable.

We know how congenial these horrid orgies and spectacles were to the taste of that savage people, and how readily the magistrates indulged them in the exhibition. The detestable character of which the Christians stood *convicted* by the very name they bore, supposes them unworthy even of pity, and deserving the *abhorrence* of mankind.

I cannot here but observe how little credit is due to the reports of the enemies of Christianity, when an historian of the high character which Tacitus has obtained, makes such a representation. Throughout the whole, evidently unacquainted with the subject of which he treats, and of the people whom he describes; and as much the dupe of credulity, and the slave of prejudice, as the meanest of the Pagan rabble.

The edicts of Nero against the Christians lying under such imputations, and standing convicted in the eyes of their enemies of every charge laid

against them, could not but be put by the magistrates into rigorous execution. The objects were so generally and deeply abhorred; the Emperor so incensed against them; the order so precise, and his own example so strongly before their eyes, that every man to whom the charge was given, must consider their activity a recommendation to his favor. Nothing can be more disingenuous and contrary to every fair deduction of reason, than Mr. Gibbon's representation of this matter. He affects to make light of it, and because we have no particular records preserved, how far, and how greatly this persecution extended, he would presume it was confined within the walls of Rome, and the martyrs comparatively few. But Tertullian, in that case, would not, in his apology have hazarded an assertion, which must, if false, have been so easily confuted, that the persecution raged through the provinces of the empire. And, indeed, they who suppose in the existing circumstances, and considering the odium under which the Christians lay, that the Emperor's edicts would sleep, or not be carried into effect, must be very ignorant of human nature; strangely credulous, or wilfully malignant. Even Nero's reign continued nearly four years longer. In such a man-tiger as Nero, it is hardly to be supposed the thirst for blood would abate; and during four years of persecution, to how many miserable victims must it have been fatal?

A self-inflicted death delivered the world from the monster, and the Christians from this bloody

scourge. The short and turbulent reigns of his successors, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, kept the Romans too occupied in their own quarrels, to attend to the rising sect. This interval of peace gave the Christians a respite from their past sufferings, and time to prepare for the future. AN. 68, 69.

AN. 70. The destruction of Jerusalem, and the utter subversion of the Jewish polity under Titus, is among the memorable events clearly foretold, and awfully verified. The Christians, conscious of the approaching catastrophe, and it is said, particularly warned of God to remove from the devoted city, fled to Pella, and escaped from the destruction.

AN. 81, 95. During the preceding reigns, we have no particular accounts of the suffering church, though most probably the fire of persecution went not out; but under the second Nero, Domitian, the brother and successor of Titus, it raged with redoubled fury. By him it is thought the Apostle John was sent into banishment at Patmos: and in the East, where he chiefly abode, the Christians were exposed to all the miseries which malignant hatred and arbitrary power can inflict on helpless innocence. Yet did the circle of Christianity extend on every side, and the blood of the martyrs proved a blessed seed, productive of more abundant fruits.

AN. 96. Nerva is said to have suspended the sanguinary edicts of his predecessor, and after a short reign of two years, the government, AN. 98,

devolved upon Trajan, the friend of Pliny, and esteemed the most humane and excellent of all the Roman Emperors. Yet under him we have one of the most authentic monuments of the fearfully suffering state of the Christian world. When such men as Trajan and Pliny, famed for mildness, prudence, and philosophy, displayed a spirit so very opposite to these pretensions, what must have been the case in general? To those who know the principles of true Christianity, and the nature of proud unhumbled man, the explication is not difficult why Trajan should be as persecuting as Nero, and though in a way less apparently savage, with an enmity more rooted, and with a perseverance more obdurate; to make the obstinacy of Christianity bow to his imperial mandates, or be crushed by the weight of his indignation.

The ingenious Pliny had been appointed by Trajan to the government of Bythinia; and in the exercise of his office as proconsul, the Christians, against whom the severity of preceding edicts evidently subsisted, were brought before his tribunal. Not having had occasion to be present at any such examinations before, the multitude of the criminals, and the severity of the laws against them, seem to have greatly struck him; and caused him to hesitate how far he ought to carry them into execution, without consulting first the Emperor himself; who, I think, had put him on the pursuit; having probably heard of the rapid progress of Christianity, and imbibed all the prejudices against it, which the misrepresentations

of its enemies; the contempt of the wise; the craft of the priesthood; and the general odium of *all* pagan idolaters, could not but have propagated. A translation of the letter itself will throw more light upon the state of the Church, than perhaps any other monument of antiquity which has reached us. Of the genuineness of the letters of Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, there are doubts; though perhaps unfounded; of the letters of Pliny and Trajan, I never heard any entertained; and being the testimony of an enemy, they afford the most irrefragable proof. We may safely conclude Bythinia was not singular for the number of converts, or the spirit of persecution; and if such means as the philosophic Pliny employed against Christianity, were only repeated through the governments of Asia, the number of victims may easily be conceived.

A. D. 107. "C. PLINY *to the Emperor* TRAJAN, *wishes health.*

"SIRE,

"IT is usual with me to consult you in every matter wherein I am in doubt, and to submit to your determination; for who better than yourself can direct me when I hesitate, or instruct me where uninformed? Till now I never had occasion to be present at any criminal process against the Christians: I am ignorant therefore to what extent it is usual to inflict punishment, or urge

prosecution. I have much hesitated also, whether there should not be some distinction made between the young and old; and in the application of the torture, whether there should not be a difference between the robust and the delicate—whether pardon should not be offered to penitence; or whether an openly professing Christian shall be allowed to retract, in order to escape punishment; whether the profession itself is to be regarded as a crime, however innocent in other respects the professor may be; or whether the crimes attached to the name, must be proved, before they are liable to suffer.

"In the interval, my method with the Christians who have been impeached as such, has been this: I interrogated them, Are you Christians? If they avowed it, I asked the same question a second and a third time, threatening them with the punishment decreed by the law; if they still persisted, I ordered them to be executed on the spot; for, whatever their profession of religion might be, I had not the least doubt that such perverseness, and inflexible obstinacy, certainly ought to be punished.

"There were others infected with this madness, who, being Roman citizens, I adjudged to be transported to Rome for your immediate cognizance.

"In the discussion of this matter, accusations multiplying, a diversity of cases occurred. A schedule of names was sent me by an unknown

accuser; but when I cited the persons, many denied the fact, that they were, or ever had been Christians; and repeating after me the usual formula, addressed the Gods, and offered supplications with wine and frankincense to your image, which, with the statues of other deities, I had ordered to be produced, adding their maledictions of Christ, to which no real Christian, I am assured, by any torments could be compelled. These, therefore, I thought proper to discharge.

"Others, named by an informer, at first acknowledged themselves Christians, and then denied it; pretending, that though they had been such, they had renounced the profession, some for three years, others for a longer time, and a few for more than twenty. All these adored your image and the statues of the Gods, and at the same time called Christ an accursed object.

"From their affirmations I learned, that the sum of all their offence, call it fault or error, was, that on a day fixed, they used to assemble before sunrise, and sing together, in alternate responses, hymns to Christ, as a deity; binding themselves by the solemn engagement of an oath, not to commit any manner of wickedness; to be guilty neither of theft, nor robbery, nor adultery; never to break a promise, or keep back a deposit, when called upon. This service being concluded, it was their custom to separate, and meet together again for a repast, promiscuous indeed, and without any distinction of rank or sexes, but perfectly

harmless; and even from this they had desisted, since the publication of my edict, forbidding, according to your orders, all clubs and associations.

"For farther information, I thought it necessary, in order to come at the truth, to put two damsels, who were called deaconesses, to the torture; but I could extort nothing from them but the acknowledgment of a superstition, depraved as immoderate; and, therefore, desisting from farther investigation, I hasted to consult you; for, indeed, the matter appeared to me deserving the most attentive consideration, especially in the view of the immense numbers of those who are involved in this dangerous predicament; for informations are already brought against multitudes of all ages, of all orders, and of both sexes; and more will be impeached, for the contagion of this superstition has not only widely spread over the cities and villages, but reached even the farm houses. I am of opinion, however, that it may yet be stopped and corrected; for it is evident that the temples, which I found nearly deserted, begin to be frequented; and the sacred solemnities, that for a long while had been suspended, are come again into practice: so that now there is a brisk sale of victims for sacrifices, where before there scarcely could be found a purchaser. From whence I cannot but conclude, that the bulk of the people may be reclaimed, if impunity be allowed to repentance."

The reply of Trajan to Pliny, I shall subjoin, as casting a fuller light upon the subject, and enabling

us from both, to form very clear views of the state of the Christian Church at that time.

TRAJAN TO PLINY.

"MY DEAR PLINY,

"You have certainly followed the right track, in the discussion of the causes, relative to the impeachment of the Christians. No certain rule can be laid down, invariably to be adhered to in all cases. They are not to be hunted up by informers, but if impeached and convicted, let them be executed: only with this restriction, that if any person deny that he is a Christian, and demonstrate it by offering supplication to our Gods, however suspicious his conduct may have been before, his penitence shall secure his pardon. But unless every information has the accuser's name annexed, whatever be the crime charged, it is not to be regarded; as it would be a precedent of the worst sort, and totally contrary to the maxims of my government."

These letters appear to give a wonderfully complete view of the state of Christianity, and the dreadful persecutions to which the faithful were exposed. For I apprehend the character of these witnesses stands so high with our modern infidel philosophers, that we shall not be accused of bringing a partial evidence when we produce Trajan and his proconsul: and that the conclusion is fair and indisputable, that under other Emperors and other governors, the Christians would not meet with more liberal treatment.

1. In the first place, it is evident, by the laws then in force, that it was *a capital crime* for any man to be a Christian; and that nothing else was necessary for his instant execution, than his own confession; or conviction by evidence of the fact; or even his refusal to commit an act of idolatry when accused, in order to his exculpation.

2. It is as clear that the humane Trajan and the philosophic Pliny appear not to entertain a doubt of the propriety of the law, or the wisdom and justice of executing it in all its fulness. Pliny confesses he had ordered such capital punishment to be inflicted on *many*, chargeable with no crime, but their profession of Christianity; and the Emperor confirms the justice of the sentence, and enjoins the continuance of such executions, without exception in favour of any, who did not apostatize, curse the Lord Christ, and worship the idols of paganism.

3. After the most exact enquiries, even from the apostate Christians themselves, without a discordant voice or suspicion of misrepresentation, never was a testimony so noble, and unequivocal, given to the excellence of the Christian character; of their piety, purity, and peaceable conduct; their happy communion with each other; and the innocence and examplariness of their lives before all men. So that by the confession of these apostates themselves, no man could belong to this holy community, whose outward walk and conversation did not adorn the doctrine of God our

Saviour in all things. And all this is confirmed in the strongest manner by the very means used to extort a different representation. It is horrible to report such scandalous perversion of the sacred name of justice! Even delicate women are put to the torture, in order to try if their weakness will not betray them into accusations of their brethren. But not a word, not a charge can be extorted, capable of bearing the semblance of evil or crime. To worship Christ their God; to meet for praise and prayer, and mutual instruction; to form engagements to abstain from every evil word and work; to be examples and reprovers of that wicked and adulterous generation; to celebrate the sacred mysteries of their faith in the participation of the supper of the Lord; and the repast of Christian fellowship which attended it—these are the *depraved superstition*, the *execrable crimes*, which nothing but a Christian's blood can expiate! I feel *a holy exultation*, whilst I record such indisputable evidence of transcendent excellence, and such martyrs for Christianity. There must be something divine in that doctrine, even our enemies being judges, that can enable men thus to live and thus to die. I feel a *sacred horror*, whilst I behold such characters as Pliny and Trajan embruing their hands in innocent blood, and decreeing such atrocious judgments against persons so amiable and just, even by their own acknowledgments.

4. I would remark the evidence of the singular peaceableness of the Christians, and their great care to give no offence, but to submit even to the most

unjust requisitions. Their immense numbers might have engaged them to stand on their defence, supposing what cannot be reasonably questioned, Pliny's own representation. Persons of all ranks, of every age and sex, had been converted to Christianity. The body was so vast, as to leave the pagan temples a desert, and their priests solitary. Scarce a victim was ever bought, or a sacred solemnity observed, through the paucity of worshippers. The defection from paganism must have been wonderfully general and striking, which could have produced such effects. But the Christians neither abused their power to resist government, nor acted with the less modesty in their worship; careful not to bring down upon themselves unnecessary sufferings. They knew the edicts against them, and assembled, to avoid offence, before break of day in their several congregations, at the houses of the faithful. And when Pliny made a fresh promulgation of Trajan's bloody edicts, they, for a while, yielded to the storm, and desisted even from their love-feasts and general communion, if not from congregational worship.

5. I may add, that a more unequivocal evidence cannot be given of the Godhead of Christ, as universally admitted in the first ages of the Church. The heathen, who knew the import of singing hymns to their deities, could not but regard the person to whom such hymns were addressed, as really and truly God in their estimation. And the contrast of the Christian worship was not stronger,

respecting the object of their devotion, than the manners of the men who offered it. *They* surely knew the import of their own praises and prayers. Could they have adored a man, they would not have found such reluctance to cast a pinch of frankincense on the altar before the image of Trajan, in order to save themselves from torments and death, in all its most tremendous forms. Our modern deistical and Socinian Christians would have been less squeamish. But these dared not to deny the only Lord God, even our Lord Jesus Christ. And whom they worshipped with their lips as confessors, they glorified with their deaths as martyrs.

6. It is awful to consider the test to which the Christians were brought, and the fearful evidence which appeared, how many had assumed the name of Christian, and deserted paganism, who had never drank into the spirit of vital Christianity: and, therefore, when persecution for the word's sake arose, they fell away from their profession, and made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. Though the martyrs were many, the apostates were more. That the martyrs were numerous, the declarations of Pliny, what *he had done*; and the orders of Trajan, what *he should do*, can leave no manner of doubt. And we have conclusive evidence of the power of God in supporting his people under every suffering and terror, in the very damsels who were tortured. Death had been a less evil for these than the rack; the suffering

then had been momentary. If the feebler sex set so noble an example, we may be assured, there would not be wanting others, who would affront death and every danger, rather than submit to these tyrannical orders, and involve their souls in this fearful criminality: Could the sacred pastors of the flock, who had preached so often and so powerfully Jesus Christ, and him crucified, call that Jesus accursed? Incense a living worm, and worship a stock or a stone? How much preferable were prisons and death to such an execrable requisition? Were there not multitudes of the flock who would follow them in the bloody sacrifice? Almost incredible to modern vulgar Christianity, as this may be, we see such things have been, and whenever a similar state of the world shall bring again the fiery trial, it will be found that the power of the Holy Ghost hath not forsaken the earth, but that there are still some, nay, many, ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.

7. How perfectly similar are the philosophical ideas of Christianity in every age? In their view it was a kind of madness—a fanatic contagion that had spread chiefly among the populace—an overstrained affectation of religion, and being righteous overmuch—an imbecility and depravity of the human understanding—a worship as absurd in its object, as superstitious in the devotion and the preciseness of its professors. Read Pliny, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, and remark how exactly coincident their views are of Christianity! And I am greatly mistaken in my knowledge of human

nature, if, in similar circumstances, the modern *infidel* would not be as bitter a persecutor as the *ancient*. With all their notions of candor and humanity, we see in Pliny and Trajan, that the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. They must hate and despise the Gospel and its professors; and whenever power is in the hands of oppressors, their pretended philanthropy will not hesitate to shed a Christian's blood.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST CENTURY;—CLEMENT, AND HIS EPISTLES.

THE testimony of the heathen writers, will, to many, convey more unexceptionable evidence than the writings of the primitive Christians. The letters of Pliny and Trajan, and the annals of Tacitus, are universally admitted as genuine; nor, I believe, was a doubt ever suggested to the contrary, whilst the Epistles of Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, have ministered much dispute, their authenticity been questioned, and charges laid againt them of fraud and interpolations. Many pretended genuine ancient works have been proved spurious, and generally rejected. The apostolic canons and constitutions of Ignatius, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermes, writings early circulated, carry forgery and falsehood on the face of them, and have been exploded by all learned and impartial judges.

Perhaps also, it might be suggested, that the writings of Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp, were not the best specimens of that age, though unfortunately the only ones which have reached us. Many probably of the Christians of that day could have wrote more ably; more clearly respecting evangelical truth; and more forcibly in regard to

argument. The style, manner, and sentiments of these respected fathers, though pious, and plainly expressed, discover a great inferiority, as authors, to many who followed them in the next ages, and still more to the writers of later times. Indeed, all those called *apostolic fathers*, appear (I hope I shall not offend by speaking the truth) low in the scale of excellence, whether in precision of doctrine, clearness of argument, knowledge and comment of Scripture, beauty of style, or forcibleness of application, compared with many of more modern date. The reverence for the fathers hath been of late greatly, perhaps too much reduced, since we have begun more scrupulously to weigh excellence, not by antiquity, but the most exact correspondence with the Divine Oracles. With these assuredly we have, since immediate inspiration ceased, better means of being acquainted, than any of the most renowned fathers. Some, perhaps all the books of the sacred code, were disseminated before the end of the first century, but these were of more difficult attainment than we can now scarcely conceive. The praise the Fathers' merit, and have well earned, is the simplicity which is in Christ; zeal to promote what they themselves believed; and readiness to seal with their blood the testimony which they bore. Let it also be remembered, that books were then so scarce; the opportunities of scientific knowledge so few and restricted; the Christians, from their station in life, and the constant scene of sufferings with which they had to conflict, so unfavourably situated, and deprived of the means of improvement, that the wonder is,

how the works of the most ancient fathers are such as we find them. If they gain not the palm of the rhetorician, they bear the nobler stamp of unadorned truth. To the honor of these holy men let it be recorded, that they did more for their adorable Master, than many of their wiser followers have been willing to attempt, or able to atchieve. They went out *preaching every where*, and God bore witness to their labors with signs following: signs, more noble than the miraculous powers, with which, I apprehend, beyond the first century, few were invested; signs of conversion in sinners of the most desperate characters to the knowledge, love, and worship of God our Saviour, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

The moment we leave the Oracles of God, tradition is but a treacherous guide; and when we must be content with the report of such authors as Eusebius, collecting at the distance of two hundred years, traditionary information; and under all the prejudices and credulity that are so glaringly marked in him, I am cordially thankful for *the more credible testimonies of heathen men.*

CLEMENT.

An. 92. The writings of this apostolic father, marked with the characters of authenticity, serve to cast some light upon the Christian Church. Whether he be the same person whose name is recorded by the apostle, (Phil. iv. 3) is uncertain, though not improbable. He had in that case, been

the fellow labourer with the Apostle, and his attendant at Philippi. Whether he was a native Roman, or left by the Apostle at Rome to superintend the concerns of that church, appears not decided. He had probably also, if Paul's associate, become well acquainted with the Corinthian Church, where wealth and wisdom had early introduced so much corruption, desire of pre-eminence, a disputatious and factious spirit, and consequently most dishonorable divisions; and these unhappily continued and increased.

The address of his Epistle to the Corinthians, remarkably resembles that of the Apostle, whose, fellow labourer he might have been. But not speaking with his authority, or in his own name, Clement communicates the result of the consideration of the whole church at Rome, on the case they had received, and now answered; addressing it to the church at Corinth, to *the called* and *sanctified in Christ Jesus*. Clement arrogates no title, assumes no dignity, nor directs himself to any individual officer in the Corinthian church; but as the organ of his own congregation, replies to the general Corinthian body, whom it concerned.

He commences with excusing the delay of an answer from the afflicted and persecuted state of the Roman church. Having in general spoken highly of the fidelity and exemplary conduct of the Corinthians, as the elect of God, he especially remarks their zeal for doing good; the fulness of the Holy Ghost in their hearts; and the spirit of

prayer upon them for pardon and peace in their own souls; and for the accomplishment of the number of the elect.

From hence he passes to the unhappy change which had supervened, when many had departed from the good old paths; and seduced by a spirit of pride and envy, left the ways and ordinances of Christ, to walk after their own lusts.

Having produced the bright examples of apostles and prophets, whom they should hear and imitate, he warns them against those who wanted to lord it over God's heritage; to introduce contention and division; and exhorts them to cleave to those ministers, whose godliness and peaceable demeanor were so different from the hypocritical professors; assuring them that Christ was only theirs who thought humbly of themselves, and presumed not to exalt themselves over his fold and flock.—That instead of gorgeous robes of distinction, they should rather imitate the worthies who wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, Heb. xi. 37. And instead of high imaginations, remember the lowly thoughts of Abraham, Gen. xviii. 27; and Moses, Exod. iii. 11.

He exhorts them to reverence their presidents *(proëgoumenoi*)* to honor the elders, and instruct the younger in the fear of God, their wives and their children, agreeably to the faith which is in Christ, and the teaching of the Holy Ghost. He

* Leaders.

particularly reminds them of the resurrection day, to enforce every exhortation; but unhappily chuses an elucidation from the phœnix, as a reality.

The sanctity of the Christian character is most solemnly insisted upon; with strong rebukes against all reviling; impure connections; drunkenness, insolence, covetousness, adulteries, and execrable pride. The true ministers whom they ought to cleave to and follow, are described by indubitable marks, as having received the grace of God in truth; being humble, self-denied, far removed from all censoriousness; and just men effectively, not in their lips, but in their lives; and who preached not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.*

The doctrines which characterize the true teachers from the false, he explicitly describes.... "We, therefore," saith he, "called by the will of

* Mr. Milner, in his excellent Church History, which, like every thing human, hath its imperfections, strongly reprobates (page 158, vol. i.) the conduct of many in the present day, as the counterpart of the Corinthian Church, who, under specious representations of the right of private judgment and pleas of conscience, fall into the heinous guilt of schism. I am astonished, that a man of his Christian knowledge and experience, can see any similitude between a multitude of gracious souls withdrawing from false teachers, and pastors who walk disorderly, working not at all, the very characters here described, and forming real churches under faithful laborers of their own choice—and proud and wicked Corinthians? Do men withdraw from *godly pastors?* For one of this description in the present day, who can be blamed for so doing; ten thousand withdraw from their parochial, or heretical teachers, on the soundest grounds of Christian obligation. The crime and the schism is with those who cause it by their unscriptural teaching and conduct, not with those who come out from among them, and are separate.

"God, are not constituted just men by ourselves, "neither on account of our attainments in science, "power of intellect, our piety, or works, even "wrought with sanctity of heart, but BY FAITH, "by which alone the omnipotent God hath justified all who ever were just before him, to whom "be glory for ever and ever!" So unequivocal a confession of the true faith is to be strongly noted, as the cardinal hinge of the question, who are the schismatics; to what teachers we must cleave; and from whom we must separate the disciples.

The good works which adorn the Christian doctrine, he proceeds to enforce, and which every faithful man must be careful to maintain.

The apostles commissioned of Christ, appointed bishops and deacons, of such as were approved by the Spirit and the whole Church, whose choice was always to be consulted, and without which no minister could be imposed upon them. As these, he observes, ministered with humility and fidelity, and with the highest testimony of their excellence; one or two insolent, proud, and overbearing bishops, should not be suffered to deprive them of their bishop's office. Happy the presbyters, he adds, who have finished their course, &c. So that in the Corinthian church, presbyters, and bishops were still synonymous. But some rich, proud, and insolent men, assumed a superiority over their fellows, and wanted to exercise dominion, by casting out of the church the most holy and exemplary pastors, whose conduct re-

proached their pride, their negligence, and worldly-mindedness.

It is evident also hitherto, that no change had been made in the election of ministers, and that every presbyter or bishop was the choice, or had the approbation of the people, without which, none had dared to intrude himself, or impose others upon the church.

Exhorting them to peace and charity, to heal their breaches, and submit to their godly presbyters, and that they may send back speedy tidings of their restoration to union and love: He concludes with a fervent prayer, that God who elected the Lord Jesus Christ, and us by him, for his peculiar people, would crown them with every Christian grace, and prepare them for his eternal glory.

Such is the substance of this famed epistle. I confess the internal evidence of its genuineness is strong, and no deviation perceiveable in doctrine or practice, from the apostolic model.

I observe throughout no mention of miraculous gifts, and am disposed to think they generally ceased with the first generation of the Apostles' converts and successors, and rarely existed beyond the first century. At least in the extended and astonishing greatness that they were at first dispensed, by the laying on of the hands of the Apostles.

One piece of history is here recorded respecting the martyrdom of Paul and Peter, though the place of their suffering is not ascertained.

On the whole this is a most valuable testimony for true Christianity, and though the difference in every view with the sacred epistles is striking, yet all the fundamental doctrines and practices are clearly laid down. The godhead and glory of Jesus Christ; the election of God; the redemption by blood; justification by faith; a confutation of objectors, strongly similar to the Apostle's arguing in the Epistle to the Romans, respecting its influence on good works; and all the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost recommended, preparatory to the glory which shall be revealed.

Tradition mentions the names of Clemens and Domitilla, persons of great rank and endowments, and of the imperial family, as numbered among the faithful in the Roman church. But Christianity cannot receive dignity from its professors, though it always confers it. The Romish church was still in obscurity, below the notice of the writers of the age, and suffering the odium and contempt of the noble and the philosopher.

What is called the second epistle of Clement is rather to be thought the first, as no mention of divisions is made in it. Indeed the whole contains little particular. The opening sentence conveys a strong assertion of the Godhead of our Lord; and the exhortations and charges are truly apostolical.

It is short, a part being wanting, and the last paragraph which is preserved, probably a spurious addition. The whole has been much questioned. Nor does it seem of any importance, since it communicates no fresh light on the subject of the Christian Church, nor adds any considerable stock to Christian knowledge or experience. The whole is unadorned with any beauty of diction, and such only as the simplest Christian might indite. Thus to the end of the first century, the church had formed no alteration in its established mode of government and order, different from what appears in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. The churches lived in near communion with each other as one body; received each other's members, as business, or the calls of the Gospel, occasioned removals, as their own; consulted each other in matters of difficulty, and reproved each other in cases of offence. But no person or church arrogated dominion over others. The church of Corinth affected no superiority over Rome, nor Rome over Corinth. Wherever the highest opinion was entertained of wisdom, sanctity, and the in-dwelling power of the Holy Ghost in any church, or her ministers, there advice would naturally be sought, and they would be heard with reverence and respect as the epistle of Clemens testifies. But no claims of pre-eminence or prelatical power here make their appearance.

Matters, however, it must be owned, rested not long in this state of lowliness and simplicity. *Ignatius* will soon be seen advancing many degrees

above Clemens in episcopal authority, and Cyprian rising abundantly higher on the stilts of prelatical arrogance. This was an increasing evil. Before the middle of the second century the change was considerable, though for a while the poverty and persecutions of the Church served as a strong check to the native corrupt affectation of power and superiority in the human heart.

Considering the times, and regarding the persons called to be saints, a learned ministry cannot be supposed in the primitive church. The presbyters must have been in general men simple and unlettered, though full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, the qualifications which then determined the suffrage of the several flocks. They were persons little suited to dispute with the philosophers on the arcana of nature, or metaphysical subtilties, but they could tell a plain and affecting story of him who bought us with his own most precious blood; who died for us and rose again; and of the guilt and inevitable ruin of all who should neglect so great salvation; and the effects produced by their preaching were seen to be mighty through God to the pulling down the strong holds of sin in the human heart, against which the heathen sophists and moralists had made their attacks in vain. Indeed the very best of *them* were themselves the servants of corruption: and, after all the fine things, so elegantly wrote about virtue and morals, their own conduct afforded a pregnant example of the impotence of the doctrines which they taught, or rather of the opinions on which they sceptically

harangued: whilst the Christian bishops not only lived what they professed to teach, but were every day ready to go to prison and to death for the name of the Lord Jesus.

The books of the canon of Scripture are supposed to have been collected for the use of the church before the expiration of the first century; and quotations from them and references to them are found in the earliest writers. But I apprehend no creed had *apostolic* sanction; though every church had their mode of admitting members on their confession of the faith, which is after godliness. How soon the creed, bearing the name of the Apostles, generally prevailed, is uncertain. I should conceive the whole was neither at once adopted, nor generally, but grew up by degrees, and became universal, as a plain and precise epitome of Christian faith. The heresies that began to prevail, seem to have contributed to this, as they made an explicit declaration on the points relative to the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ more necessary, and his glory and Godhead were yet the foundations of every real Christian's faith and joy.

CHAPTER III.

ON HERESIES.

THE Apostles' Creed naturally leads to the consideration of the grand heresies, which, commencing in the times of the Apostles, and hardly checked by their presence and labours, burst forth with greater violence, when towards the end of this century, these apostolical men were removed to their eternal rest. These heresies were chiefly twofold, proceeding from the natural pride of the human heart, the sources of which St. Paul had so distinctly marked. "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness." As many of both these were brought to the confession of the Christian faith, and only partially abandoned their own former prejudices; they early indulged their peculiar speculations.

The DOCETÆ, of whom the Cerinthians and Nicolaitans seem to be branches, supposed the human nature of Christ to be only an apparent body, and not real manhood; and thus the doctrine of atonement by him, and all the consequences thence flowing, with the resurrection of the dead, entirely vanished. These, from their nice and curious speculations on the divine nature, and their at-

tempts to explain every thing mystically and allegorically, received the name of *gnostics*. St. Paul described their pretensions, then already begun, as *science, falsely so called*.

The others were called EBIONITES, from their leader Ebion; supposed by Tertullian, to be a Jewish sect; though I am rather disposed to think they were the offspring of the Judaizing Christians, who had given the church so much trouble, and particularly had occasioned so many divisions at Corinth and Galatia. They admitted Jesus Christ to be a true man, and of a transcendently excellent character, but they supposed morals constituted the essence of religion; and excluded every idea of the incarnate Deity, as a substitute for others, and a propitiation for our sins: supposing that *by their own virtue* and excellence, they became entitled to the favour of God, and that copying his example, which demonstrated how far a holy man could arrive towards perfection, they might claim true discipleship. The same pride of knowledge, and vain conceit of human ability continue to produce the same effects, and though men now may not adopt all the whims of Gnostics or Ebionites, in the essential points of heresy they exactly copy them. All Arians, Socinians, deistical, philosophical Christians, and all proud and self-righteous pharisaical professors, who think they can commend themselves to God by their own doings and duties, are the seed and descendants of the Gnostics and Ebionites of the

first age. As the nature of corrupt man is the same, under whatever shades heresy appears, in essence and principle it will be always alike, and spring from one or other of these grand sources of error, an overweening conceit of our own wisdom and science, or a high imagination of our native moral powers, and ability to walk and to please God.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE SECOND CENTURY, AND THE MARTYRDOM OF IGNATIUS.

AMIDST the flames of persecution kindled without, and the corruptions and errors broached within, the Church continued to raise her sacred head encircled with glory, and to enlarge her borders farther and wider. The luminous evidence attending the Gospel word; the Divine power which attended the preaching; the holy lives of its professors; the zeal of confessors, and the blood of martyrs failed not to make daily and numerous converts to the truth: and as Pliny informs us, *Civitates, vicos, agros pervagata est.* The great towns first evangelised, were filled with multiplied churches. The villages naturally received the light bursting from them, and all the vicinage formed similar assemblages. And, as is the nature of Christian zeal, it knew no bounds, but diffused the knowledge of Christ into the very farm-houses, where overseers and slaves, who usually tilled the ground, heard and welcomed the liberty with which Christ had made them free.

After the departure of the great itinerant Evangelists to their rest in glory, and on the increasing extent of the Christian church in every place, the

desirableness of a stationary, president seems to have introduced a change in the government of the several evangelised cities and churches. The very learned Chancellor King endeavours to prove, that in the largest cities there was but one church and one bishop. I have already given my reasons for differing from him, and for supposing the necessity of many house congregations, where the body of Christian professors was so great: and as they sought to avoid observation, and attract as little as possible the attention of the rulers, they would not assuredly, in such immense multitudes, have assembled in one place. That about the beginning of the second century, a bishop appears at the head of a presbytery, can hardly be doubted, and the name became appropriate to *one*, which before, all the presbyters had equally borne. Being now no longer under the superintending care of the great apostolic Evangelists, who went about every where to establish order, to preserve the unity of the Church, and be the cementing bond of the whole body, the several churches and presbyters seem to have chosen one of their own body to supply the presidence these had before exercised. Whether the largest cities, however, as King argues, formed only one congregation with many presbyters, or, as I rather think, consisted of many congregations with presbyters in each of them, the whole seems now to have formed one body, under a superintendant or *(episcopos*)* chosen by

* Overseer.

themselves. Every church exercised discipline over its own members; in which the whole assembly of the faithful gave their suffrage. The reverence for their pastors was great, but clerical dominion had as yet found no place.

Such appears to have been the state of the Church in the beginning of the second century. All the Apostles, probably, and the men of the first generation, who had been the disciples of the Lord, and come forth from Jerusalem, had by this time finished their testimony; as well as most of a second race, who had heard them. The churches had therefore no longer these oracles of wisdom to consult in their emergencies, but were left to the general teaching of the word and spirit, and the directions received before their departure. Tradition affirms, that the Apostle John survived the rest, and lived to the end of the century, or nearly, closing his race at Ephesus. But as there is little reason to suppose he was exempted from the general lot of mortality, his feebleness and imbecility would prevent probably the churches from receiving any essential advantages from his labours, some time before he finally closed his mortal career. Though the current of tradition will have all the apostles martyrs, for the honour of Christianity, I see no reason or conclusive authority for supposing it; and rather think it probable, that delivered from his banishment at Patmos, and restored to his brethren, he peaceably finished his course, and departed like the patriarch, in a good old age and full of days, and was gathered unto his fathers, as well as others of the apostles.

A dark cloud of persecution now lowered over the Christians, justly provoked by their divisions and declensions from apostolic purity, simplicity and humility. The short reign of Nerva had cast a gleam of sunshine and peace, after the storms which had gone over them. The toleration with which he had indulged them, ceased on the accession of Trajan. He bore an utter enmity against Christianity, and seems to have apprehended it in a political view, as ready to introduce a system contrary to the despotism which he cherished. And the obstinacy of the Christians, in refusing to submit implicitly to all his commands, provoked the hatred of a man, who, assuming deity, and demanding worship, could not bear to be contradicted and opposed by the meanest of his subjects. He considered not the cause, the fact was sufficient in his view to justify his severity.

I refer to the letters just produced of Pliny and Trajan, for the truth of what is here affirmed, they speak unequivocally. Persecution could not but rage under such a man, and of such a spirit. The first distinguished character and martyr of this century, whose writings are come down to us, was

IGNATIUS.

I mean not to enter into the genuineness of his epistles, or the interpolations with which they are charged. I am disposed to receive conviction from the arguments of those ingenious men, who have concluded their authenticity; and they carry every internal mark of belonging to that age, and

to the person to whom they are imputed; and as such are valuable monuments of antiquity. An. *107 to 116.*

The authenticity of the acts of Ignatius is justly questioned. Some facts, however, may be separated from the fables with which they are mixed. His character appears excellent, and his end glorious; though the means which led to it, if truly recorded, which I doubt, will by no means demand our imitation or approbation. He is said to have been the Bishop of Antioch, when Trajan visited that city in his expedition against the Parthians, in the year *107.* The persecution against the Christians, as appears from the letters above mentioned, had raged with great fury in Asia, and continued unabated. Ignatius, who had hitherto been spared, or protected, (as tradition reports) appeared now too ambitious of martyrdom, and determined to present himself before Trajan, and to defy the fury of the oppressor. The reasons given for his conduct seem indefensible in the highest degree; for, instead of averting the storm by offering himself to suffer, it cannot be supposed but that this must have had the strongest tendency to bring down the arm of vengeance upon his flock in general. The conference, reported in the acts of Ignatius, may be fabulous, and an attempt of some officious Christian of a subseqent age, to cast a false glory over the martyr, who, if the relation was true, would appear in the eyes of every enlightened mind, blameable for rushing on his own destruction, without any apparent call of duty.

The enmity of Trajan against the Christians, might naturally lead him to enquire in his journey through the provinces, for the most eminent of the Christian teachers: and on them chiefly his wrath would descend. Probably Ignatius was seized by his order; and having made a noble confession of his faith, was sentenced to be devoured by wild beasts in the theatre at Rome, to intimidate that numerous body of Christians whom Trajan had left behind; or to excite, by this instance of his own severity, the activity of the magistrates to continue the persecution with vigor, when such an example from the emperor himself spoke his pleasure respecting the full execution of his edicts.

Ignatius may, indeed, have acted imprudently, or replied improperly. It is not necessary to vindicate every act or word of the best of men. His letter to the Romans is very exceptionable, but it is sufficiently evident that his Christian courage was proof against the fears of death, in its most tremendous forms; and, that nothing had a stronger tendency to confirm the faith of his church, than that he was willing not only to be bound, but as Paul, to die for the name of the Lord Jesus. The zeal, which even errs, is respectable, and infinitely preferable to the worldly wisdom, and timid prudence, that contrives every mean device to shrink from the Cross. We should neither court it in self-sufficiency, nor shun it in the way of duty.

He was sent guarded to Seleucia, then to Smyrna, there he is said to have been visited by Polycarp.

Thither deputies from several Asiatic congregations came to comfort and converse with him. And during his stay there, four of the seven letters supposed to be genuine, are written. They are far from elegant compositions, neither marked with purity of diction nor strength of reasoning; and sometimes tumid and affectedly rhetorical.

In doctrine he seems not to have degenerated from the truth as it is in Jesus. The superscription of the epistle to the church of Ephesus, marks strongly the doctrines of grace. He speaks humbly of himself, and very highly of Onesimus, and of the church, brightened in the furnace of affliction. Whether this be the person mentioned by Paul, who had been slave to Philemon is uncertain. He especially commends union and peace, and repeatedly enforces obedience to their bishop, and carefully to avoid every occasion of division in the Church.

A presbytery, with a bishop at their head, is now first distinctly marked; and obedience to them enjoined as to Christ, in a pretty high strain of authority; and subjection to the bishop repeatedly inculcated, as to God himself.

In this epistle I find the first mention of the Virgin Mary, but in no wise leading to superstitious reverence for her. Throughout the whole, union with Christ, as the living head, is taught as the essence of genuine Christianity, and his own

assumed name of *Theophorus*,* is indicative of his personal experience on this behalf.

He exhorts them to unite constantly for the exercise of divine worship; marks with the strongest language the deity of Jesus Christ—his divine and human nature—ascribes to him the knowledge of the secrets of all hearts—he himself being our indwelling God, and we his consecrated temples.—In all good fruits, therefore, we must give proof of the living tree; and all corruption of the flesh must be avoided—knowing the fearful punishment awaiting every defilement with women, even eternal torment, and fire which never will be quenched.

The real divinity of Jesus Christ; his incarnation, as God and man in one Christ; faith in, and union with him, as the true life of Christianity; purity of character; the eternal punishment of sin, are clearly and precisely marked as the doctrines of the true Church.

It must be acknowledged that there are some expressions, (if these are not the interpolations of after-times) amidst all the professions of humility, too self-exalting: an episcopal elevation which begins to peep out; and a foundation laying for more arrogant claims. The bishop at the head of a presbytery, probably numerous, feels himself too important, and seems peculiarly jealous to impress a sense of this dignity of office on the

* Theophorus, bearing God.

Ephesians. His impatience to be the food of beasts, and his eagerness to prevent the least efforts for his deliverance, and deprive him of the honor of martyrdom, to which he aspired, may have had motives to justify his desire to himself, though they do not to us.

The epistle to the Magnensians, if not spurious or interpolated, is full of the same episcopal exhortations, and still something heightened. "Be "subject to the Bishop, as Jesus Christ to the "Father, and the Apostles to Christ, and the "Father, and the Holy Ghost." Though a softening salvo is added, and "to one another also." The title given in the address to the bishop, "To THE MOST DIGNIFIED," savours not of apostolical humility.

The warnings against a judaical and pharisaical spirit show how that inveterate evil stuck in the Church; and that the Jewish sabbath had not yet wholly given place to the Lord's day. Repeated mention of the Father, Son, and Spirit, as the doctrine of the Lord and his Apostles, leaves no doubt of the faith of the Trinity in Unity, as uncorrupted, in the Magnensian church. The Magnensians, with the Trallians, were new churches, here first noticed in the records of antiquity.

In his epistle to the Trallians, whose bishop was Polybius, who had visited him at Smyrna, he appears careful to exalt the clerical character. "Reverence," saith he, "the Bishop as the re-"presentative of God the Father, and the pres-

"byters, as God's sanhedrim." And again, "He "that is within the altar is clean, but he that is "without, that is, who doth any thing without the "bishop, presbytery and deacons, he is not pure "in conscience." Against the errors of the Docetæ, or the deniers of the reality of Christ's sufferings in the flesh, and of his resurrection, he is particularly strong and explicit. Many blessed truths are occasionally interspersed, but the principal object seems to be, the inculcating obedience to the clergy.

In the epistle to the Romans, passing over his rhetorical figures of desire to be devoured by the beasts, which mark a haste for martyrdom, and a description of it too florid, there are a few noble sentiments. "Nothing seen is eternal, momentary "are the objects of sense, but the things unseen "are for ever." "For as much as Jesus Christ "exists in the Father, he appears the more glori-"ous." "Christianity though it is hated by the "world, is not to be concealed in silence, but to "be manifested in all its greatness."

The letter to the Philippians is nearly in the same strain as the preceding, as is that to the Smyrneans, where the same episcopal obedience is again and again inculcated. "Without the bishop, "neither baptism should be administered, nor a "love-feast kept."

The letter to Polycarp will deserve the most attentive consideration of all who reverence Ignatius, and episcopacy. Such conduct as he

recommends will render the office venerable. Such diligence, activity in Christ's work, and devotedness, deserve all affection and submission. If such bishops appeared, divisions would seldom be known, nor could their deserved eminence of excellence be too highly esteemed. "To watch "with a spirit ever attentive—to speak to each "member of the church separately—to seek out "all by name—even the slaves of either sex— "and to advise every one of the flock in the article "of marriage"—demands a very contracted diocese, or an activity of labour inconceivably great.

From the whole of these epistles, I remark,

1. A forwardness to invite martyrdom, that was of ill example: and is no where countenanced in the sacred writings.

2. Episcopal pretensions, such as had never before appeared. Clement's epistle suggests not a tittle like it.

3. The laborious office of a prelate, on whom so much devolved, and from whom so much was expected.

4. That though a bishop, presbyters and deacons, seem to have been the established form of the Asiatic churches, yet these were still the election of the people.

5. That criminal as it is to withdraw from a zealous, faithful and laborious pastor, as absurd

would it be to expect the faithful to receive and submit to one whose conduct is the very reverse. When the bishop causes the people to leave him, for his negligence, worldliness, pride, and ignorance, both of his duty and of his flock, he is the schismatic, not who withdraws, but he who makes such a separation necessary.

6. Amidst evident infirmity in the faithful—schismatical divisions, and great apostacy in the day of temptation—there evidently appears a blessed generation of redeemed sinners ready to suffer, and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ; holding fast the faithful word, and standing in the blood of atonement, and by the power of the Holy Ghost; adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, and living witnesses for the power and purity of the everlasting Gospel. No absolutely perfect men or churches are to be looked for; but such as were truly faithful, and called, and chosen, abounded in the days of Ignatius.

7. There was a glorious spread of the Gospel of Christ amidst the fire of persecution without, and the offences and apostacy within. The insufficiency of the instruments employed, to all human view, considering their helplessness, want of literature, and degradation in every thing which gives eminence, respect and authority in the sight of men, offers an irrefragable evidence of the divine power which enabled the weak things of this world to confound the mighty; and the foolish things of this world to confute the wise; and to make the

simplicity of Gospel truth, and the despised doctrine of the Cross triumphant over the malice, might, and reasonings of all its enemies.

8. Whatever heresies had attempted to lift up their heads, their progress hitherto had not been great. The Church as a body had generally continued a spiritual Church, walking in the light of truth, and under the influence of the Holy Ghost. Philosophy had scarcely yet begun to introduce its debasing mixtures; nor had the teachers presumed to be affectedly wise above what is written. No insolence of public excommunication by any episcopal authority, had yet appeared; much less had the foreign bishop of another church dared to thunder out his anathemas. Christians were too much taken up with the weightier matters of salvation to quarrel and excommunicate each other about the day on which Easter should be kept; or the nicety of definitions respecting matters, of which words are incapable of conveying distinct ideas, because they relate to the incomprehensible God, and his mode of subsistence; these had not yet been introduced. The flood-gates of evil were however now opening, and ready to deluge the Christian Church. Error and persecution were about to drive the woman with the man child into the wilderness, where though existing, they were to be hid for a time, and times, and half a time.

Conveyed to Rome after a tedious navagation, Ignatius was impatient to close the scene; and devoured by wild beasts in the theatre, afforded a spectacle to that inhuman people.

POLYCARP, OF EPHESUS.

An. 160. Polycarp, the friend and disciple of Ignatius, followed his example; and under a succeeding reign finished his faithful testimony by the sacrifice of himself on the altar of truth. I am induced to antedate his history, and to introduce him in this place, on account of his letter to the Philippians, which breathes nearly the same Spirit as those of the preceding martyr, and approaches nearest to the primitive simplicity. He adopts exactly the apostolic salutation, maintains the fundamental doctrines of the death and resurrection of Christ, and the benefits thence accruing to believers. He exhorts to the practice of all Christian graces—urges the necessity of deadness to this world, and the mortification of all inordinate desires.—He describes the duties of presbyters to their flocks very forcibly, and the obedience reciprocally due to them for their labours of love. Throughout the letter he appears the real plain Christian pastor, without affectation of human science, or the appearance of pride or superiority; every where sound in the faith, and devoted to the work, ready to die for the Lord Jesus. As he properly belongs to the times of most uncorrupted simplicity, I have placed him with Clement and Ignatius. All their epistles hitherto speak a language simple and plain, destitute of all philosophic novelties, or affectation of the wisdom of this world. The Scriptures are every where quoted by them in their literal and genuine sense, not distorted into unnatural and absurd allegories.

The life of faith in the Son of God, is the great point and object most insisted upon. Subtilties of dispute, and niceties of definition, are never introduced. Their mode of writing appears designed to inform the mind, by inculcating the revealed truths of God, and to recommend their influence on the conscience and the conduct. No *secret doctrine*, as has been suggested, was reserved for the initiated in the mysteries of Christianity; like the Apostle, they shunned not to declare freely, fully, and universally, the whole counsel of God. Those who made confession of the faith openly, and adorned it by a conversation becoming godliness, were admitted to the sacramental pledges, and joined to the Lord and his Church in visible communion. And those who disgraced their Christian profession by unbecoming conduct, or cowardice in the hour of trial, were cut off from the society of the faithful, by the universal suffrage of the church to which they had belonged, declared by the bishop or presbyter; nor could they be restored but by the same authority, after giving the most unequivocal proof of their repentance. A relapse was irremissible for ever.

Though the gnostic heresy had begun its progress, and even before the death of John, there were many antichrists; yet the curious philosophic disquisitions of platonism, had not yet been engrafted on Christianity, nor many, wise under the sophist's cloak, begun to make the religion of Jesus more palatable, and conformed to the admitted

principles and practices of all religions. The church was yet a garden inclosed, though here and there weeds had grown up instead of flowers and fruit. Personal disputes about pre-eminence, and the desire to draw away disciples after them, appear the first of evils, lamented and opposed by these good men, whose writings we have reviewed. Human nature is the same in all ages. The grand matter of controversy, as yet, related to the method of acceptance with God in the one atonement of Jesus, in opposition to the legal injunctions, still insisted upon by judaizing and self-righteous teachers, in order to justification of life. This controversy never can cease, it will continue to the end of time, being in the nature of man; and though the abolition of the ceremonial law be now admitted, the doctrine of grace, as contrasted with works for acceptance with God, must be controverted, as long as the unawakened conscience fancies itself possessed of moral powers to walk and to please God, and reason a sufficient guide for the discovery of all saving truth.

Hitherto not a man eminent for science or letters had appeared in the church. All those whose works have come down to us, bear a stamp of simplicity, divested of human attainments. Yet by these, the Gospel had been supported in its purity; afforded a noble army of martyrs; and been spread to the ends of the earth, from the pillars of Hercules to the Parthians—from the savage nations of the north, to the Indies and Abyssinia.

It has been disputed whether human wisdom and philosophy have done more harm than good to the Church of God. There seems to be one plain criterion to judge. Our weapons are not carnal but spiritual, and only mighty through God to the pulling down the strong holds of sin. A plain unlettered man, powerful in the Scriptures, and taught of God, is no doubt, at this day as capable of the ministry of the Gospel, and able to wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, as ever. Not indeed in a long string of rhetorical arguments, and with mathematical precision, but in close application of the truth as it is in Jesus, to the consciences of men. And when modern bishops despise such for their lack of science, they little resemble the best of their primitive predecessors. The present opportunities of learning are so much facilitated, as to have added greatly to the scientific attainments of all ranks of men. And leisure for study and superior advantages, naturally increase the sum of knowledge of every kind, in a larger number of individuals than formerly. But if any man supposes himself cased in this armour, a giant, and capable of beating down the battlements of error and infidelity, he will find himself woefully disappointed; and that the lines of approach, and the defences will be nearly equal. I am fully sure that all the finest apologies for Christianity, and the polemics of the most irrefragable doctors, who trusted to the force of moral suasion, never made *one real Christian*. Knowledge, considered in itself, is highly desirable. The improvement of the human mind delightful and useful. And when

the noblest attainments are laid at the foot of the cross, and like Paul we still determine to know nothing else but Jesus Christ, and him crucified, then, and only then, is it worth contending, whether human attainments were ever useful for the propagating genuine Christianity.

A learned and ingenious age prides itself in its superiority in defence of revealed religion, and apologies for the Bible. And what is produced by a Conybeare, a Warburton, or a Watson, will be read with admiration and applause by scientific men, and those who are initiated in all the learned lore. But what hath this arguing proved? The plain story of a poor unlettered man, telling of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which hath followed, with their consequences, hath done more in the way of conversion to real and vital Christianity than all these great polemics put together. When could these point out one sinner truly converted by their labours from the evil and the error of their ways to the knowledge of the Son of God, and to divine communion with the Father, in spirit and in truth; whilst the other is surrounded with a thousand witnesses of men by his ministry, turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may obtain an inheritance among those who are sanctified through faith, which is in Jesus Christ. I see the smile on the wise academician, and the contemptuous infidel. But I am not ashamed of that Gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth; nor of the

sound though unlearned teacher, who having diligently read his Bible, and been taught of God himself, addresses his brethren, and is blest with their conversion and salvation. *Medicus est qui medetur*. He is the best doctor who cures me.

CHAPTER V.

ON RITES AND CEREMONIES.

THE simplicity of Gospel truth ill accords with a farrago of rites and ceremonies. Nothing could be more unadorned than the primitive worship. A plain man, chosen from among his fellows, in his common garb, stood up to speak, or sat down to read the Scriptures, to as many as chose to assemble in the house appointed. A back room, and that probably often a mean one, or a garret, to be out of the way of observation, was their temple. The particulars of their worship recorded, were those still observed in the true churches of Christ throughout the world. Hymns sung to Christ, as their God, appeared, to the heathens a prominent and striking feature of the Christian worship. The Holy Scriptures were read in portions—and the presbyter, or bishop, or two or three of the congregation, who were endued with prophetic or preaching talents, spoke a word of exhortation to the people, agreeably to the Scriptures which had been read. Prayer *from the heart, without a prompter*, followed: the bishop, or presbyter, the presiding minister, leaving the devotions, to which the people replied with a loud and audible, Amen. The whole was a spiritual, not a formal service. They prayed with the spirit,

and prayed with the understanding also; they sung with the spirit, and sung with the understanding also. He that led the worship prayed from his heart and out of its abundance. We have yet no trace of any form or established ritual. The mode of worship was left to the discretion of the several churches and its minister. I have no doubt the Lord's prayer always made a part of their public services.

The supper of the Lord closed the devotions of his day. I think it was as constant as the return of that day; and every member of the church as constantly a participant. A friendly meal or feast, called *agapæ*, from the love and union in which they kept it, served at once as an opportunity of ministering an act of charity to the poor; and of testifying their unity in one body, where all distinctions of poor or rich were laid aside, and no man took before other his own supper; but all, with humble equality, acknowledged themselves members of the living head, Christ, and of one another. I think the kiss of peace was there given, as they sat at table.

Then, also, I apprehend, every man produced, according to his ability, weekly, what he had laid by for charitable purposes, which formed a fund of *oblations* under the control of the church, through the administration of the bishop, presbyters, and deacons, for all the various purposes of general good; such as purchasing the elements for the Lord's Supper; the provision of the table for the

agapæ; for the necessities of the poor; the support of Evangelists; the relief of the persecuted; and for the assistance of such churches and persons, whose indigence called for the help of their richer brethren. As yet I can perceive no part of this fund appropriated to pay the salaries of any minister of the sanctuary, unless as he came under the title of an itinerant Evangelist; and being incapable of providing his own maintenance, and wholly occupied in the Gospel work, was justly entitled, as preaching the Gospel, to live by the Gospel. I very much doubt if the bishop or presbyters, and deacons, received at first any thing for their labonrs of love. I am persuaded they thought their work their best wages.

CHAPTER VI.

ON MIRACULOUS POWERS.

THE gift of tongues, so needful for the first promoting of the Gospel, appears to have now generally ceased, the great end for which they were given having been answered. And I read, with much suspicion, in the next century, of Gregory Thaumaturgus, and the wonders of his fellows. Pious frauds early debased the Church; and the principles and the practices of the men, who are the recorders of these miracles, render the report very apochryphal. That such were performed during the lives of the immediate successors of the Apostles, may be admitted; but I am free to confess, beyond that period, I doubt: nor do I suppose Christianity ever depended upon miracles, or permanently required this support. Miracles never converted a sinner to Christ, though they may have called his attention to the Gospel testimony. The truth is independent of them: I find no miracles in Clement, Ignatius, or Polycarp. When Quadratus addressed his first apology to Adrian, AN. 117, who succeeded Trajan, he appeals only for the evidence of miracles, to those of our Saviour; and mentions persons who were still alive, on whom they had been performed. But

he vouches none of a very recent date, which would have been more to the point of his argument, if produceable. I confess my opinion here is different from the current of what is called antiquity; but when I consider the miracles themselves, at least many of them—the credulity of reporters—the mistaken zeal for the honor of Christianity—the witnesses who come forward—and the channel through which the tradition flows—the more I weigh all these circumstances, the fewer miracles I am induced to credit. I will not affirm that the whole is fictitious, but I may confidently say, much is false upon the face of it, and in that case alone, the rest is rendered highly suspicious. Even good men were often weak men, and their credulity more to be pitied than severely censured. With all their mistakes, they were living monuments of Divine grace, and gave a dying testimony of faith unfeigned. At least, of the multitude of miracles reported, we may say they were an appeal to evidence not necessary. *Testibus dubiis in re non necessaria.* But I return to the current of history.

SECTION III.

CENTURY II. TO THE END.

HAVING carried on the History of the Church to the end of the reign of Trajan, and added the death of Polycarp to close the writings of the first apostolic fathers, we shall hasten to the end of the century, and proceed to the establishment of Christianity by law under Constantine; compelled as we advance to deplore the prevailing corruptions; to behold the fair features of truth deformed with the daubings of philosophy, and the venerable matron disguised with a load of drapery that scarce left a trace of primitive simplicity; a kingdom, not of this world, transformed into an earthly sanctuary; and the power of godliness almost lost under accumulated forms and rites of human institution.

To the end of the present century, five objects will comprise our enquiries.

1. The sufferings of Christians under their persecutors without.
2. Heresies within.
3. Principal personages.
4. Government, rites and ceremonies.
5. Spiritual Church, where preserved, and how to be traced.

CHAPTER I.

SUFFERINGS OF CHRISTIANS UNDER THEIR PERSECUTORS.

WE have considered the edicts of the humane and benevolent Trajan, and their execution by the philosophic Pliny: and nothing can afford a more striking proof of the sufferings of the Church, than that the very best of the emperors manifested as bitter an aversion to Christianity as the most brutal; and had their hands as deeply imbrued in the blood of martyrs. During the reign of Trajan, a period of about twenty years, how dreadful their case must have been, we may collect from the specimen which authentic history has preserved. It appears that his edicts were unrepealed, and continued in full force. Wherever the activity of magistrates, or the malignity of accusers, brought forth their charges, real or supposed, the innocent suffered. Being the object of general odium, it can hardly be doubted, from what we see in present times, but that every accusation against *them* was credited, however absurd or contradictory. It was much more easy to condemn than examine. When Christians, from their renunciation of all false deities, were termed Atheists—from their nightly and secret assemblies, supposed to perform mysteries that were in their nature the most horrid—

and under the covert of darkness to commit the greatest impurities—to be the implacable enemies of mankind, consigning all others who did not embrace their faith to eternal torments—the most unsociable of beings, who refused to join in all the common and highly coveted amusements of the theatre, or private entertainments—secret rebels against government, because they generally avoided the army and magistracy, as unable to take the oaths, or to adore the reigning monarch;—these, and a multitude of other causes which could be suggested, and were supposed, as Pliny observes, inseparably connected with Christianity, rendered them ten thousand times more obnoxious than men of any other religion, which however diverse from that established by law, might obtain toleration. But this militated in all its points against emperors, priests, philosophers, and every thing hitherto held sacred or respectable: and, with an intrepidity and zeal, which no torments could suppress, called by their persecutors obstinacy, these men would, at all events, braving every danger, propagate their opinions, and not keep their religion to themselves.

From these adopted premises nothing was easier than to convict every Christian, in the judgment of his heathen enemies, of the most complicated crimes. And wherever an accuser was found, I see not how the law could be prevented from taking its course against them. The innocence of their lives was no protection. Not only was this not credited, but their own confessions of Christianity,

and obstinate resistance to every idolatrous rite, left them without a plea in the face of the edicts that must judge them. No doubt the humanity of some governors, and probably the avarice of others, bribed by the richer Christians to keep the penal laws out of sight, procured in many places a sort of quiet impunity. And often the contentions between men in power, for the succession to empire, engaged them in matters more interesting to themselves, and diverted their attention from this hated and spreading sect. Yet with every possible abatement, under such edicts and such men, the sufferings of the church must have been deplorable; and nothing but its divine original and support from the great Head, could have sustained it in the fires, and spread its conquests over the obdurate and prejudiced hearts of men.

An. 117. The edicts of Trajan, and preceding emperors, against the Christians, continued unrepealed under *Adrian*. And we have no reason to suppose that the enmity of their persecutors much relaxed. The apologies of Quadratus and Aristides to this emperor, manifest the dreadful state of sufferings under which the Christians then laboured. But probably a representation from one of his own pro-consuls in Asia, Seranius Geranius, engaged him to pay more attention to the subject. Emperors and historians were too great to take much notice of the despised Christians or their concerns. The rescript of Adrian to Minucius Fundanus, the next pro-consul, enjoins a mitigation of their state. Idle clamours must not be heard, but if *any thing contrary to the laws* was proved, they must take

their course; and every Christian was obliged to do many things, or abstain from them, which the law, without any prejudiced distortion, could easily lay hold upon.

A fresh source of persecution also opened. Always hated by the Jews and persecuted wherever they prevailed, a respite from their malice had been enjoyed since the fearful vengeance executed on Jerusalem and that nation, by Titus. But their prejudices respecting the Messiah; the unconquerable hope of a temporal deliverer; and their numbers, though so dispersed and thinned by slaughter, engaged them once more to rally under the standard of Barchochebas, and contend with the Romans for empire. During the course of this rebellion, the Christians refusing to join the standard of this false Messiah, suffered the most atrocious indignities, and were massacred without mercy, till the rebel's fall, and the destruction of his adherents, once more covered them from his rage. It was then that an utter exclusion from the city of their solemnities, put a final period to the Jewish polity. The very name of Jerusalem was changed to Elia. *A little church, with a few houses only*, occupied by Christians, preserved the remains of that once vast society. A pompous list of Jerusalem bishops, in Eusebius, marking the succession, true or fabulous, is of little import. AN. 132.

Whether the rescript of Adrian produced any change in the Christians' favour, is dubious. Certain it is, that the rage of persecutors had broken

out afresh; and drew from Justin Martyr a noble appeal and apology to the emperor Antoninus Pius, refuting the abominable charges laid against the Christians, and vindicating the excellence and exemplariness of their conduct. An. 138.

The calamities which befel some of the Asiatic cities, being laid by the pagan priests to the door of the Christian athiests, they were sacrificed cruelly as victims to the supposed anger of the offended deities. But the Emperor, on a representation from them, issued a fresh decree, which speaks highly in the Christians' favour, and could not but tend to suspend the arm of the magistrates; forbidding Christians, merely as such, to be molested; so interpreting the rescript of Adrian, and making them only in common with other subjects, liable to the penalty of the law, for crimes against the government. Mr. Gibbon supposes this decree spurious. It is hardly worth disputing. Favoured or oppressed by emperors, there will be always enough in all that will live godly in Christ Jesus to bring down persecution upon them. Supposing this edict genuine, and there seems no sufficient reason to impeach it, a noble testimony is again therein borne to the Christian character. And the imperial sceptic, who entertains doubts about his own gods, seems as an humane infidel, content to leave others the same liberty of conscience, which he himself exercised.

An. 161. His successor Marcus Aurelius, so highly celebrated for wisdom and virtue, and

priding himself on his philosophic attainments, with stoical unfeelingness, as well as self-sufficiency, soon discovered his bitter enmity against Christianity and its professors. He credulously received all the atrocious charges of the pagan priests and infidel sophists, and, deaf to the remonstrances and apologies of Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tatian and Melito, let loose his savage magistrates on these inoffensive subjects, who died under the imputation of crimes which they abhorred, and became the victims of popular fury and a bigoted philosopher. Never had the Christians more unjust and cruel treatment. Polycarp, Justin Martyr, and others, fell before the implacable enmity of the stoic; and whole churches were nearly extirpated by the malice and cruelty of his pro-consuls. There is an hatred and inveteracy in self-righteous all-sufficiency against the real Christian, never felt by the most profligate or savage. The blaze of rage in a Nero is as the flash of lightning; the rooted enmity of an Aurelius, is like the inextinguishable fire in the bowels of the volcano. None but a Christian knows how to appreciate the real characters of men. The heart throbs at recounting the tragedies performed in cold blood on the helpless, and turns away with sickening disgust from the philosophic persecutor and his assassins.

An. 180. *Commodus*, in character, appears the very reverse of Aurelius—an epicure, and abandoned to every vice. Marcia, a woman of mean

origin, was a beloved concubine of the Emperor; and having great influence over him, employed it in favour of the Christians, whom she either pitied or esteemed. There is something in real Christian virtue, venerable in the eyes even of a profligate, though abhorred by the proud philosopher or pharisee; and God can make the basest of persons subservient to the purposes of his own glory, and the good of his Church. The wretch, Henry VIII. no more meant the reformation, than Commodus the protection of Christianity. Eventually their lawless passions produced these blessed effects.

The reign of Commodus will bring us nearly to the beginning of the third century, and as the Church now enjoyed a measure of peace, I shall interrupt the succession of Roman Emperors, and bring forward each of the other particulars, up to the present period.

CHAPTER II.

THE HERESIES OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

THE simplicity of Scripture truth had been the first object of the preceding confessors. Illiterate men, not coming from any of the schools of philosophy, they adhered to the doctrine of the Cross, and its atonement, and entered not into niceties of disquisition on the nature and attributes of God or the human soul. They spoke to the conscience, what they had learned of Christ, and experienced in their hearts. In this period however, matters unhappily took a different turn, and men affecting to be wise above what is written, began to introduce a philosophical Christianity, pregnant with all the heresies that have since infested the Christian world. Presuming to explain every thing, and reconcile incomprehensible truth to human capacities; lost in the labyrinths of vain reasoning, they involved themselves in errors, endless and absurd as the source from whence they sprung.

Trajan, from the commencement of his reign, had endeavoured to revive the decaying interests of literature, but the Augustan age returned no more. Rhetoricians, sophists, and grammarians opened schools in the various cities of the empire, but the genius of Tully and Hortensius had de-

generated into declamation, and the purity of the Roman eloquence into puerilities of rhetorical figures. The philosophers of the different sects still held their ground; but the *Eclectics*, with Ammonius at their head, taking Plato for their teacher, and engrafting on him all that was applicable from the other sects, prevailed; especially in the school of Alexandria, and spread from thence universally. It would be taking too wide a range to enter into all the depths of the Ammonian philosophy. The attempt to reconcile all sects of philosophers—to amalgamate the heathen mythology, with the Jewish and Christian religion—to form one body from these heterogeneous materials —presents a chaos, out of which sprang all the monsters of error which preyed on the rising generation. All was dressed up in mystery and allegory; and the widest scope given to the wildest flights of imagination.

Christianity, which hitherto had little to boast of its converts among the learned and philosophic, began now to receive a spurious adoption, by these new disciples of Plato; but suffered grievously from the unnatural alliance. Instead of the simplicity of truth, it became wrapped up in mystical and allegorical interpretations of Scripture, by which the vital spirit evaporated, and lost all its genuine force. From this school came forth men famous in their day, Justin, Origen, Tertullian, Pantænus, and many others, zealous indeed in apologies for the Christian cause, and ready to die rather than renounce their profession, yet holding

a Christianity of so equivocal a nature, as to render it very dubious whether they had any real part or lot in the matter. From their writings originated the doctrines of Pelagius, Arius, and all the train of exalters of human ability, and debasers of the glory and atonement of God our Saviour. They retained the profession, title and garb of philosophy, and meant to add thereby a dignity to the Christian religion, which they espoused. Candor, was their declared temper; truth, their pursuit; and readiness to submit to the dictates of right reason, their boast. From these sprang the two grand sources of Christian declension.

1. *Error in Doctrine.* Instead of keeping to the Scripture language, and being content to be ignorant of what faith adores, and reason cannot scan, their attempts to pry into the things which are not seen, and to define spiritual objects more precisely, opened a door of endless controversy about the nature of God, and the mode of his Divine subsistence—concerning the person and glory of Jesus Christ—respecting the souls of men—and a future state. As their views of God, the Son, and Spirit, were more or less degrading, a departure followed from all the essentials of Christianity—the vicarious atonement of the great High-Priest of our profession, Jesus Christ—and the influences of the Holy Ghost on the human heart.

2. *Error in Practice.* Under an affectation of greater spirituality, as leading to absorption in God from all created good, and thus exalting the soul

to sublimer purity and human perfection, they placed the great objects of religion in contemplation, retirement from the world, and bodily mortification. Hence sprung, in the succeeding ages, the whole brood of mystics, monks, hermits, and recluses. The principles of platonism produced their ascetic rules, and seclusion from human society, with all the evils inseparable from a state so unnatural, and contrary to every thing contained in the Scriptures of truth.

I rather mention these heresies in their source, than in their ramifications; so numerous as to exceed all the bounds which this short abridgment of Christian history will permit. Their very names would fill pages. Some of the leading features will appear, when we consider the principal personages who have stood most prominent in the Christian Church, so called. The true Church cometh with less observation, and is to be traced in its noblest form and purity among the poor of the flock, and those simple Evangelical teachers, who, uninfected with the nostrums of philosophy, continued to teach and preach Jesus Christ, and assuming no superiority over their fellows, or distinctions in life, diffused their fragrance, like the flowers of the desert, unnoticed and unknown.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE EMINENT PERSONAGES AND WRITERS, TO THE END OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

JUSTIN, SURNAMED THE MARTYR, AN. 163.

THIS father of the Church stands first in the ranks of the Alexandrian school; and among the wise men of this world, who began to combat paganism with the weapons rather of earthly, than of heavenly temper. The account he gives of himself, is, that he was a native of Neapolis in Samaria, had a learned education, and went to the famed school of Alexandria for improvement. There his inquisitive mind, engaged in philosophical pursuits, ranged through each sect in turn, and found nothing conclusive or satisfactory. The Platonic system, which he had last endeavoured to fathom, appeared to him most spacious and attractive. When, taking one of his contemplative walks by the sea side, he providentially met an aged Christian on the shore, where he was musing, and one question having led to another, the unknown stranger directed him to the prophets as more ancient and infinitely wiser than all the philosophers. He opened to him the leading principles of the Christian dispensation—and exhorted

him above all things to pray to God and his Christ, to enlighten his understanding. They parted; remained unknown to each other; but from that moment a new scene opened to Justin's view. He examined the Scriptures of truth, and became professionally at least, a Christian; to confirm him in which the serenity of the martyrs greatly contributed.

Every intimation in history, if but collaterally, demonstates the frequency of the execution of Christians for their religion in various parts of the world; and Alexandria was not the least marked with the blood of the slain.

Justin became now professionally a Christian, yet, still more than half philosopher in sentiment, and his garb unchanged, he proceeded to Rome, the seat of empire, to combat heretics, and present to the Emperor Pius, his first apology for his Christian brethren, which has been mentioned. He therein completely refutes the charges brought against them, describes their worship, and vindicates their purity and simplicity.

He had observed in his apology, how few Jews had ever embraced Christianity, and how the Scriptures had been fulfilled in them. Trypho, the Jew, at Ephesus, encountered him. Their dialogues on that occasion, though little interesting, are still extant.

After a considerable absence, returning to Rome, the bloody persecution of his brethren, roused his

spirit to address the bitter philosophic Aurelius, on the cruelty and injustice of these executions. Crescens, a profligate philosopher, whom he had rebuked for his iniquites, impeached him before the Præfect, and his sophist's garb was no protection to his person; he was committed to prison, and with others his companions, executed, after being interrogated and threatened in vain by the Præfect of the city; but he steadily avowed his veneration for Christ, and his refusal to comply with every act of idolatry required of him. AN. 168.

It is impossible not to reverence the martyr, and to hope that the root of the matter was in him; but truth compels me to acknowledge, that many things suspicious are found in his writings. He seems to confess Jesus as the true God, but we wish for a more explicit testimony; an Arian might subscribe to his confession. He speaks of justification, regeneration, and forgiveness of past sins through Jesus Christ—acknowledges the necessity of Divine illumination—and the certain punishment of the wicked in torment eternal; so far all appears well and consonant with truth; but his Platonic opinions blend with his Christian profession. He insinuates, that Plato and Christ taught nearly the same doctrines—supposes a general illumination from God in the pagan sophists, a particle of the Divine word, which he calls the Son of God, and innate in every man. The high panegyric of Socrates, an idolater, in the last act of his life, and his reasoning on the freedom of the human will, nearly in the strain of the modern followers of

Arminius, leave evident tokens, that though it may be hoped he was a good man at bottom, and a Christian, yet still he remained a Platonist, a mystic, a self sufficient patron of innate moral power, and far too philosophical to be scriptural. The wisdom of the schools of Alexandria had darkened the brightness of evangelical glory in his mind, and rendered him, in many points of Christian doctrine, confused, if not erroneous and heretical; and, like many of the fathers, a very miserable guide to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus.

IRENÆUS.

Elected Bishop, . . AN. 178,
Martyred about . . . 203.

Irenæus succeeded Pothinus, the successful evangelist of the Church of Lyons, over which he presided. He had come from Smyrna, and with singular blessing spread the knowledge of salvation in that part of Gaul. Irenæus, his presbyter, was chosen in his place. He was a Greek, and learned the barbarous language of Gaul, in order to be able to instruct the people; a proof that the gift of tongues had probably now ceased. The labours of his ministry were great, and of his writings still greater. He combated all the heresies then subsisting in the Church. The very names of these are an awful witness how much, and among how many, the purity of the Christian doctrine and practice had begun to be corrupted. He is far more valuable in confuting his adversaries, than in his delineation of the Evangelical truth. Here,

like Justin, his philosophic opinions mingle with and debase the Christian purity. He quits the Scriptural grounds of God's election, and grace, and supposes all that self-sufficiency of the human intellect, and human agency, which bespeaks a man too little acquainted with his own heart. He argues from tradition more than Scripture, and has given the strong handle for the papistical abuse since made of it. Indeed it must be acknowledged, that there is scarce one of the fathers, who hath not expressed himself in terms so indistinct, or so improper, as to afford to every modern heretic some ground of argument to support their several sentiments. Irenæus, however, has in an unequivocal manner, avowed the deity of our Saviour, the redemption effected by his blood, and our union in the second Adam, Jesus Christ; though mixed with a farrago of philosophic notions. Speaking of the ministers before him, he calls them *the presbyters* who walked with the apostles, and distinguishes his friend and brother Polycarp, as that *blessed apostolical presbyter*, a title still, it seems of first eminence; but his character is less marked by his writings than by his ministry and sufferings. The church of Lyons was exposed to the most violent storm of persecution, and no where, if we may believe tradition, did the power of the grace of Jesus more eminently appear, than under the ministry of Irenæus and Pothinus. The part of an epistle preserved in Eusebius, gives a noble account of the holy army of martyrs, suffering with such propriety and constancy; from the man of fashion to the servant; from the bold

champion to the tender youth, with the exalted glory of the feebler sex, submitting to every indignity and torment: the mistress and her female slave, together witnessing to the power of the grace of Jesus, enabling them to triumph over all the cruel and malicious devices of their persecutors. I read, I wonder, and adore! Whether Irenæus fell in the general massacre, or was reserved for a future martyrdom, is not absolutely certain: the first strokes of vengeance would naturally light on those who presided in the Christian assemblies. A bishop, a presbyter, then, must have renounced his office, or not counted his life dear unto himself. Let not the moderns read this as a romance, or fancy from any present contrast, that Christianity hath altered its nature. The same enmity against it is still in the human heart. Providentially a milder system of government prevails; but the time again may come, to try what manner of spirit we are of; and it is an awful truth, that he who is not ready to lay down his life for Christ's sake, gives no conclusive evidence of his true discipleship. Ah! how would our ranks be thinned, were such a day as Lyons experienced, to return?

TERTULLIAN

Flourished from 194 to 220.

Tertullian is a striking instance, how much wisdom and weakness, learning and ignorance, faith and folly, truth and error, goodness and delusion, may be mixed up in the composition of the same

person. No man more distinguished himself in defence of the Christians, or possessed a larger fund of all that was in that day esteemed deep philosophical research. Yet no man exhausted his zeal more about trifles, or set more value upon will-worship and voluntary humility; austere, melancholic, monkish, superstitious, credulous. Severe to himself as to others, he presents a face, as forbidding as his writings are difficult, and stuffed with absurdities that will ill repay the labour of perusal. Displeased with the laxity of discipline, he quitted the church of Carthage to join the *Montanists*; and insensible to his own corruptions, as impitiable to the infirmities of others, his teaching breathes a harshness of censure, the very reverse of Christian mildness and patience. But I quit a subject so unpleasant, which the farther we enquire leaves the more disagreeable impression of a character, that with all these faults and follies, was not destitute of peculiar excellencies; on these I shall more delight to dwell. He shall speak for himself. Ad Scap. ch. ii. "It is every man's right and "natural claim, to worship as he thinks fit. One "man's religion neither profits nor injures another. "It is contrary to the nature of religion, to use "compulsion with any man to be religious; this "can only be derived from choice, and not coer-"cion. The sacrifices of God must be the offer-"ing of a willing mind."

I copy another passage from Milner, out of his Apology. "We look up to heaven with out-"stretched hands, because they are harmless, &c."

" without a prompter, because we pray from the " heart." " We pray for the Emperor, whatever " Cæsar would wish for himself in his public and " private capacity. I cannot solicit these things " from any other than him from whom I know I " shall obtain them; because he alone can do these " things; and I am he who may expect them of " him; being his servant, who worship him alone, " and lose my life for his service." " Were we " disposed to return evil for evil, it were easy for " us to avenge the injuries which we sustain; but " God forbid that his people should vindicate " themselves by human fire, or be reluctant to en- " dure that by which their sincerity is evinced. " Were we disposed to act the part, I will not say " of secret assassins, but of open enemies—should " we want forces or numbers? Are we not dis- " persed through the world? It is true we are but " of yesterday, and yet we have filled all your " places, cities, islands, castles, boroughs, coun- " sels, camps, courts, palaces, senate, forum. We " leave you only your temples. To what war " should we not be ready, and well prepared, even " though unequal in numbers, we who die with " so much pleasure? Were it not that our religion " requires us rather to suffer death, than inflict it. " Were we to make a general secession from your " dominions, you would be astonished at your " solitude."

Again, " We are dead to all ideas of honor and " dignity. Nothing is more foreign to us than " political concerns. The whole world is our " republic."

"We are a body united in one bond of religion, "discipline, and hope. We meet in our assem- "blies for prayer. We are compelled to have "recourse to *the Divine Oracles* for caution and "recollection on all occasions. We nourish our "faith by the word of God, we erect our hope, "we fix our confidence, we strengthen our disci- "pline, by repeatedly inculcating precepts, exhor- "tations, corrections and excommunication, when "it is needful. The last, as being in the sight of "God, is of great weight, and a presumptive pre- "lude of the future judgment, if any behave in so "scandalous a manner as to be debarred from the "holy communion. Those who preside among us "are elderly persons, not distinguished for opu- "lence, but worth of character, &c." Their noble charities to brethren and enemies—their strict justice in paying every tax and imposition—without fraud or collusion, &c. with other particulars, raise the highest monument to their integrity, patience, and purity.

I cannot dismiss this Apology, without noticing the unimpeachable veracity of the truths asserted, which, if not capable of proof indisputable, would have been immediately detected, retorted, and covered the apologist with confusion. How truly great does the body of Christians then appear, and how little do we appear in comparison with them?

Every thing here advanced by Tertullian respecting the number and conduct of the Christians, is fully corroborated by the preceding letters of

Pliny and Trajan. A few particulars shall be recapitulated respecting the Church in that day.

1. The presbyters who presided, were elected by the Church, not for any distinction, but solely *worth of character.*

2. In the public worship, *prayer from the heart,* was the universal usage, *without a prompter.*

3. *Honor and dignities* were disclaimed by every Christian, as not at all entering into their views, or objects.

4. They busied themselves in *no political contests.* Their kingdom was of another world. Even where their numbers and power were sufficient to resist, they chose to vanquish their enemies by suffering and patience, rather than by arms.

5. No person, whose conduct was *in any manner offensive,* and contrary to the gospel precepts, could *join in their communion.* So far, therefore, from the practices with which they were charged, being true, their very discipline demonstrated the falsehood of their accusers.

6. Men who *made conscience of paying taxes* to Cæsar, which they might have evaded with impunity, could not but *conscientiously discharge every other debt and obligation.*

7. *Liberality,* such as they exercised to all men, demonstrated their victory over all avaricious de-

sires; the deadness of their affections to this world, and the fixedness of their souls on a better.

8. Though Tertullian himself affords but a very wretched specimen of Christianity, his Apology demonstrates, that in all the great and glorious features of this divine religion, there was a people in that day eminently to the praise of the glory of God's grace.

There are other personages, many and respectable, whom I must pass over; though famous in their generation, and men of renown. Pantænus, of Alexandria; Dionysius, of Corinth; Theophilus of Antioch; Melito of Sardis; Apollinaris of Hierapolis; Athenagoras, and others, whose writings made them noticed in their day, and have been so far preserved to us as to prove, that the faith once delivered to the saints, in the Scriptures of truth, was still preserved in its purity. And though in many of them it was obscured by philosophic novelties, and Platonic explications, yet the great foundations of a triune God—the incarnation of Jehovah the Son—the power of the Holy Ghost upon the conscience—the one atonement—the efficacy of faith—and the necessity of holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord—these may be found in all the earlier writers; too often indeed mixed with fables; dubious miracles; fanciful explanations; absurd allegories, and practices, as indefensible as destitute of all authority from the oracles of God.

I may add, as my own opinion, that the best part of the Church was not that which was *most visible.* I should expect to find the greatest purity of doctrine, and simplicity of practice, among, not the wiser philosophic Christians, but the more unlettered and inferior pastors and people, who, without busying themselves about these novelties, or being able to read Hermes or Plato, contented themselves with the Evangelists and epistles, and lived and died in obscurity, examples of every thing that is excellent and of good report. But they leave no writings that attract curiosity, nor stand in any eminence of station or literature, to engage that admiration which is oftener attached to what is counted *great*, rather than to what is simply GOOD.

CHAPTER IV.

GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH, RITES AND CEREMONIES.

IT is evident to every one who reads ecclesiastical history with an unprejudiced mind, how soon a spirit of pride and pre-eminence began to debase the ministers of the sanctuary: as, according to the miserable nature of man, every distinction is liable to abuse. From the equality of the first pastors, a second race ascended one step above their fellows, and from the greater progress of Christianity, and the necessary calls to attend to the general interests of the whole, superiority of some over others, became established by universal consent. Instead of little households united under one presbyter, the churches in many places became numerous, as well as the multitude of attendants in each. Towns, and districts adjacent, naturally became connected, a president was found necessary. Where a vast body of Christians was collected, one man was insufficient for all the calls of the church and people. Assistants were taken in, and deacons first instituted for the care of the poor only, became employed in other inferior departments of ministerial service. From a single society governed by its own members, under apostolic superintendence, union was formed be-

tween several, and a superior chosen by general suffrage, or received from the oldest congregation. Many churches were thus associated, and on occasions of general concern, they met to consult in a body, composed of the principal persons deputed from the several societies, of which the pastor or bishop was always one. At first they appeared merely as the delegates of the respective congregations; but when thus frequently assembled, they soon began to assume authority, and imperceptibly to act in their own name, instead of that of the people, to prescribe without consulting them; and gradually separating themselves as a clerical body, too frequently endeavoured to aggrandize themselves; arrogating privileges and distinctions, unknown in the first lowly days of the Church: and rising in self-importance on every acquisition of power, to which veneration for their leaders made the people submit. Notwithstanding the piety, humility and prudence of the best, the loftier and more imperious generally took the lead in their synods; influence degenerated into dominion, and counsels into canons.

As the borders of Christianity were enlarged, and the number of bishops increased, they naturally united in one great confederate republic, of which they were become the heads and leaders: and, as at first a bishop or bishops were appointed where they had several presbyters their assistants, so another step became necessary, when a large district or province met in assembly, and many bishops were present; a superior was still needful

for order, to manage debates, and maintain uniformity in their sessions. Then archbishops arose: and as the Church thus grew more monarchical, great capitals and very extensive sees, mounted into patriarchs; till at last the attempt to imitate imperial state, led to one supreme visible head; though this was only after ages of abuse.

As pride and worldly mindedness must go hand in hand, assumed pomp and dignity required a sort of maintenance, very different from the state when the pastor wrought with his own hands to minister to his necessities, and laboured by day, that he might serve the church by night. The idea of priesthood had yet scarcely entered into the Christian sanctuary, as there remained no more sacrifice for sin, and but one high-priest of our profession, Jesus Christ. But on the dissolution of the whole Jewish œconomy under Adrian, when the power of the associated clergy, began to put forth its bud, the ambitious and designing suggested, what many of the rest received in their simplicity, that the succession to these honors now devolved upon *them*, and that the bishop stood in the place of the high-priest, the presbyters were priests, and the deacons, levites: and so a train of consequences followed. Thus a new tribe arose, completely separated from their brethren, of clergy distinct from laity. Men, sacred by office, exclusive of a divine call and real worth. The altar indeed was not yet erected, nor the unbloody sacrifice of the Eucharist perfected; but it approached by hasty strides, to add greater sanctity to the priesthood,

and the not unpleasant adjunct of the divine right of tythes, attached to the divine right of episcopacy.

These abuses indeed grew not up at once. The remaining piety and purity of the true Church, and multitudes of its primitive pastors, retarded the progress of worldly-mindedness and ambition, till the union of Church and State in the establishment of Christianity under Constantine, pretty nearly completed the worldly system. The consummation of abuse and wickedness in the mother of harlots and all abominations, succeeded; and long has the earth, (I can hardly call it the Church) groaned under the anti-christian tyranny.

The simplicity of the primitive worship contrasted with the pomp of paganism, was striking. It was concluded by the heathen, that they who had neither altar, victim, priest, or sacrifice, must be atheists, and without God in the world. Those who were now rising into self-created eminence, had therefore little difficulty to persuade, that it would be for the interests and honor of Christianity, to remove these objections of the Gentiles, by very harmless but useful alterations. Though magnificent temples had not yet arisen, the names of things began to change. There were already *priests*; and *oblations* were easily rendered *sacrifices*. The separation of the clergy, as a body, became more discriminated by their habits. *High-priests* must have more splendid robes than the simple tunic of linen. A variety of new ceremonies was invented to add dignity to the mysteries of Chris-

tianity, and obviate the objections to its meanness and simplicity. And, as the populace were particularly attached to their idolatry by the festivals in honor of their heroes and their gods; and delighted with the games and pastimes on these occasions, the great Gregory Thaumaturgus, shortly afterwards contrived to bilk the devil, by granting the people the indulgence of all the same pleasures of feasting, sporting, and dancing at the tombs, and on the anniversary of the martyrs, as they had been accustomed to in the temples of their gods, very wisely and christianly supposing, that thus, "*Sua sponte ad honestiorem, et accuratiorem "vitæ rationem transirent.*" "Of their own ac- "cord they would quit their idolatry, and return "to a more virtuous and regular course of life." I must be exceedingly hard drove for a Christian, before I can put such men as Gregory Thaumaturgus into the number.

The feast of Easter, in memory of the passion and resurrection of Christ, was generally observed amongst Christians. But even the proper day gave occasion for bitter dispute and sharp anathemas. Ah! how feeble must be the voice of true Christianity in those who could thus curse their brethren for such trifles!

The blessed ordinance of the commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ, and of the benefits which we receive thereby, continued to be celebrated weekly: but with some additional ceremonies. The wine was now mixed with water; the bread divided in pieces, and sent to the sick and absent. It became

also increasingly important, and supposed essential to salvation; and therefore ministered to infants; a proof of their being baptised.

The administration of baptism was now only admitted from Easter to Whitsuntide, which began to be a festival. None could baptize but the bishop, or a presbyter deputed by him. The adult converts and the children of Christian parents, were admitted into the Church by immersion, signed with the cross; and milk and honey administered, concluded the ceremony. So multiplied became the rites even of this second century.

It is always observable, that the forms of religion increase, just in proportion as the power of Godliness is lost.

CHAPTER V.

OF THE SPIRITUAL AND TRUE CHURCH.

IT is impossible to have reviewed the savage cruelty of persecutors, and the faith and patience of the saints, and not behold a striking specimen of the Church of the living God. Amidst all the mistakes of the sincere; the departures of heretics from the faith; and of too many professors from the life of godliness; a blessed company of faithful people, witnesses for Christ, still increased and multiplied on the earth. Every church presented a numerous body of worshippers, whom no dangers could intimidate, nor earthly advantages tempt to renounce their crucified Master. And, with all the unhallowed mixtures, which we cannot but lament and condemn, a truly holy seed sprang up amidst the tares of philosophy, and the rank weeds of pride, which the great enemy had plentifully disseminated: even among those branded with the name of heretics, I cannot doubt but that there were found many living members of Christ's body; but the great mass of the faithful, and the great power of religion, were to be sought in the lower orders of clergy and people, who busied themselves not with philosophic investigations; joined in no contentions for pre-eminence or ad-

vantage; nor affected the austerities of heresiarchs; but simply receiving the truth as it is in Jesus, searched the Scriptures for the mind of God, and followed it in simplicity and godly sincerity. The doctrine in all the churches, seems fundamentally yet preserved pure; and the practice could not have much degenerated, where so many were ready to lay down their lives in hopes of a joyful resurrection; a state highly incompatible with a sense of hypocrisy, or allowed corruption. And, indeed, all the apologies, and the evidence which universally appears from enemies, as well as friends, declare the truth and fidelity of the general body of those who bore and owned the Christian name.

That there were always hypocrites in the Church, and even martyrs to false principles, I can readily believe; but every view of the whole, demonstrates that there was a true Church of faithful men, who loved our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; worshipped him in spirit; and looked for an eternal rest, ready to be offered in flames, rather than deny the Lord that bought them. I read with grief, the mistakes, the follies, the credulity, the heresies of many; but I contemplate with greater delight and veneration, the stedfastness in the faith; the simplicity which is in Christ; and the exemplary purity of others, who living, adorned—and dying, glorified, the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Hitherto no general departure from the truth, no marked apostacy appears. Episcopal power was indeed extended, but many of these bishops

were evidently the best of men, and most zealous advocates for truth. Profane learning had more abundantly entered the Church, but it furnished able advocates; if not the most edifying to the people of God, yet supposed more qualified to confute their enemies. Persecution had not abated its fury, nor had the faith and patience of the saints failed. There were spots and blemishes among them, and seeds sown of deleterious quality; but as yet the Church was a glorious Church, red in in her apparel, and precious in the sight of the Lord of life and glory.

SECTION IV.

TO THE DEATH OF CYPRIAN—AND THE END OF THE THIRD CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.

SUFFERINGS OF THE CHURCH.

DURING the short reigns of Pertinax and Julian, the humanity of Commodus seemed to prevail above the brutality of an Antonine, and the Church, enjoying quiet from the more bloody ravages of persecution, increased in number, and was edified.

AN. 202. Severus, during the first years of his succession, trod in the steps of his immediate predecessors. Though a severe law was passed, prohibiting any man to change the religion of his ancestors for the Jewish or Christian, it was only in the tenth year of his reign, and the beginning of the third century, that his rage burst forth as fire against the Christians. Whatever was the cause of this change, the consequences were terribly fatal to the Church of Christ. Alexandria, Scillita, Car-

thage, and other cities of the African church, were particularly exposed. The father of Origen suffered, and he himself, though a youth, hardly escaped; eager to offer himself to martyrdom. Multitudes were dragged to prison and to death; and many a heroine gave noble proof of the strength of faith in the weaker vessel. The story of Perpetua and Felicitas, if genuine, contains traits that touch the most insensible, and cannot be yet read without a tear. It is indeed to be lamented, that pious frauds detected, have often raised suspicion of what is best authenticated; and truth itself, dressed in these meretricious ornaments, is robbed of its transcendent beauty. Austin believed, and quoted this example, and there is nothing in the story, as related by Eusebius, but what is highly credible.

Lyons again was dyed with the blood of martyrs; and Irenæus, who is by some supposed to have survived the former storm, either now, or under Valerian, received the crown of martyrdom.

Many are said to have purchased connivance from the government, and to have bought off the informers, and thereby escaped the fury of the persecution; and if they could redeem their lives by parting with their substance, I see nothing in this to condemn. The rigid casuists of that day, however, highly censured the practice, and too many appeared emulous to rush upon unnecessary danger, and to court martyrdom.

An. 211. Death delivered the Church from this scourge, and brought forward the infamous *Caracalla* to be the protector of Christ's suffering people. Few men have exceeded him in the atrocities of vice; but an early attachment to a Christian nurse is said to have prejudiced him in their favour ever after: on such slight circumstances, turn matters of the greatest moment. During his six years reign, the Christians enjoyed full toleration unmolested, which continued under the monster Heliogabalus, who was too much engrossed with the science of eating to attend to other cares. His contrast in rigid virtue, Alexander Severus, continued a measure of the same kindness, influenced, it is said, by his mother Julia, who favoured Christianity. Nay, he so far commended the Saviour, as to count him worthy of a statue among the demi-gods and heroes; but the statutes against Christianity, remained unrepealed; and, though the penal laws slumbered, it was always in the power of a malignant magistrate to be mischievous; and, therefore, there were not wanting instances of murder and martyrdom, inflicted under colour of the law, during the reigns of the most peaceable princes. An. 218, 222.

An. 235. Maximin, who murdered Severus, dreaded the resentment of the Christians, because the last Emperor had favoured them, and issued his bloody edicts against the bishops and pastors of the Christian Church; and with them were involved many of the faithful. Persecution once stirred up and promoted, wicked magistrates will always

be ready to push it to extremes—many suffered; but death, after a three years' reign, delivered the world from this tyrant. A hasty succession of Pupienus and Balbinus, followed by Gordian and Philip, the last reputed half a Christian, procured a calm for the persecuted Church, which continued till the middle of the century; when the accession of Decius to the imperial throne, once more opened the gates of hell, and let loose upon the defenceless churches the merciless executioners, who deluged the earth with blood. AN. 238, 249.

From whatever cause or apprehension of danger, this Emperor's prejudices against the Christians arose, certain it is, that short as his reign was, never did the Church suffer from her most invenomed enemies severer treatment. Multitudes fell in every province. The orders to all prætors and magistrates, extended to the extirpation of the Christian name; and whilst multitudes braved all the rigours of punishment, more, unhappily, gave proofs of their weakness, and introduced by the immensity of their numbers, difficulties and disputes about their re-admission to the Church, unto which many desired to return. Gallus and Volusianus, though with less fury, continued the persecution, AN. 251, 253. *Valerian* was at first more friendly, and extinguished the fires which had been kindled; but falling under the influence of Macrianus, a pagan bigot, his prime minister, fresh edicts were published against the assemblies of the faithful; their principal bishops sent into banishment; and many executed with the most lingering torments.

Divine providence interposed, and delivered him a captive to his enemies. His son *Gallienus* and his successor *Claudius*, either more engaged in their own concerns, or less malignant, suffered the Church to enjoy a few years respite; and the meditated destruction of the Christian name by *Aurelian* was prevented by his violent death. *Tacitus*, his successor, soon left the empty throne to *Probus*. *Carus*, and his sons, followed; and *Dioclesian* maintained for the first eighteen years of his reign, the peace which, with few interruptions, the Church had enjoyed for the space of forty years. AN. 260, 284.

But forty years of peace, though it had greatly spread the profession of Christianity, had introduced a spirit of worldliness and decay. The Church became more and more *external*; the power of the clergy began to advance with hasty strides; and the seeds of eclectic philosophy produced a plenteous crop of heresies; which awakened up clamour to suppress, and councils to condemn them, and tended abundantly to increase clerical pretensions.

Yet at no time had the struggles between Paganism and Christianity been more severe, or the martyrs more abundant, than towards the middle of this century; and from the beginning of it the conflict had been sharply carried on. The heathen priests, envious, and enraged to see their craft in danger, and their temples deserted, moved heaven and earth to stop the defection from idolatry, and to bring back the apostates. The Jews expressed their rooted enmity on every occasion,

and the philosophic sects, with Lucian at their head, whetted the edge of argument and ridicule against the disciples of the crucified Nazarene. But above all, the prætors and magistrates, as passion, covetousness, or superstition goaded, enforced the edicts of the cruel Emperors; and under colour of executing the laws, gratified every unhallowed disposition of the human heart. The number of sufferers in all the various modes invented by persecutors, it is impossible to calculate—a few persons have been mentioned; but in the vast extent of the Roman Empire, where the same laws subsisted, and the same spirit prevailed, with all the possible softenings of a Gibbon, and others, to diminish the sufferings of martyrs, and rob the Church of this testimony of their faith and patience —the sufferers must have been immense; and if we had no records of a thousand facts corroborative of the truth, the very nature of man, under such a state of society, would compel us to form this conclusion. I admit, that many additions have been made to the truth; many pious frauds palmed upon credulity; and in the true story, circumstances interpolated, which too partial friendship suggested for the honor of the martyr; but taking the matter with all the objections and ingenious suspicions that infidelity can raise, the fact will remain unimpeachable; that in this century, many, in a great variety of places, of every age, sex, and condition, even to the very slaves, were tortured for the name of Jesus, not accepting deliverance on the conditions of idolatry, that they might

obtain a better resurrection: and, however cold-blooded and atheistical historians may seek to exalt their philosophic heathen brethren, and to blazon the characters of the most impious and cruel of mankind, the Trajans, the Antonines, and the Deciuses; to invent specious reasons for their enmity, and excuses for their atrocities; degrading the Christians and their character by every base suggestion; and pleading the errors and mistakes of a few, to depreciate the excellence of the body: yet will the Church be found a glorious Church, coming through the fire of temptation, and demonstrating its divine Original, and the omnipotent power of its exalted Head, in conquering all difficulties, rising superior to all suffering, overturning every mound of superstition—confounding every device of proud philosophy; triumphant over all the opposition, wisdom, and prejudices of mankind, through the simple preaching of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The man who can consider this impartially, and continue an unbeliever, believes a great deal more than I do, and must have recourse to a credulity much greater than any which he presumes to ridicule.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE HERESIES OF THE THIRD CENTURY.

IT must needs be that offences come. The pride of wisdom, and the corruption of the human heart, naturally produce error and evil; but woe to those in whom they originate. The seeds already sown began to shoot forth with luxuriant foliage, and the tares in many places to overshadow, if not to choke the wheat. The miseries which the Church suffered, occasionally checked its growth, and made a separation between the precious and the vile; yet the evil itself continued to spread. During the intervals of persecution, and in many places where money or interest procured an exemption from the penal statutes, the Christians enjoyed a state of prosperity, were connived at in the army, had preferment at court; were unmolested in their profession; and throve in the world by their temperance, industry, and frugality. Abundance, as it always has done, proved a snare. To be *rich*, without *trusting* in uncertain riches—and *exalted*, without *feeling* the pride of exaltation, is a rare attainment.

Christianity had now also assumed the philosophic garb, and many of her most famed doctors became eminent for their science, and teachers of the eclectic philosophy. The schools of Alexandria,

with Origen at their head, and their manner of tuition, began to produce an awful departure from the simplicity which is in Christ. In order to meet the various philosophic sects on their own ground, and to soften down their prejudices against the cross, a mode of arguing and disputation was admitted, very different from "thus saith the Lord;" and a general admission granted, that *Paganism included many principles of Christianity*; and that the philosophy of Plato, Hermes, and Pythagoras, perfectly corresponded with the leading doctrines of the great Christian teacher, Jesus Christ. Indeed, to reconcile these together, and to make the transition easy from heathenism and Platonism, to the profession of Christianity, was one of the great objects of its most renowned defenders. Can it be wondered then that error entered at a thousand doors, when concessions the most unscriptural were admitted, opinions the most uncongenial reconciled, and so great a stress laid on the importance of philosophic attainments, as to raise those to the highest pinnacle of human glory, who displayed the strongest powers, and the largest measure of these acquisitions of science, falsely so called? As the leading feature of this philosophy, begun chiefly by Ammonius, and carried to its summit by his famed disciple Plotinus, was, "that truth must be impartially sought, and "collected from all the various systems in which "it had been dispersed," the sacred circle of revelation no longer afforded a boundary for religious knowledge; but the schools of the stoic, the epicurian, and academic, must be all explored, and

the precious metal, separated from the dross of the various philosophic sects, be formed into one mass of solid excellence.

Since human reason alone, was asserted to be the proper and competent judge, and sovereign tribunal to which every doctrine must be submitted, *revealed* truths could only be received or rejected according as they passed the philosophic ordeal. The imbecility of the human intellect, and its incompetence to fathom the deep things of God, were utterly denied. The proud sophist, seated on his throne, summoned to his bar Jesus Christ and Plato, Moses and Pythagoras, and arrogantly canvassed their pretensions with the same freedom and liberty, and selected from each according to his own opinion.

From such a motley religion, it was impossible even in the eclectic school, but a thousand different conclusions should be formed, as men were disposed to view this or that doctrine in different lights; with different measures of knowledge on the subject; or capacities to form a judgment of the several works perused or produced by the lecturer. And, as a divine revelation, to which implicit obedience should be paid, was rejected; and a divine interpreter to illuminate the darkness of the human mind was thus exploded, the very essential principles of true Christianity were inadmissible into the whole of this system. Yet as the first of their opinions, the unity of the godhead was drawn from revelation and mixed up with the other ingredients of the schools; and especially with the reveries of

Plato, the most admired sophist; though in essence their religion was deism, yet many made profession of Christianity. With these ORIGEN, the great oracle of the day, associated; and to render Christianity more palatable and rational, debased the pure doctrines of the cross, with the unscriptural alloys of human wisdom and eclectic science. Casting his preponderating weight, as Mosheim observes, into the scale of *the transcendent excellence and utility of human learning in matters of religion*; a point till then strongly debated by Christians of purer faith and greater simplicity, as well as equal, if not superior numbers; but now, borne down by authority, the unlearned and simpler Christians retired with the Bible from the field of controversy, and left the honors of the day to Plato, Plotinus, and the philosophic school of Origen. Where truth remained, a gracious heart can be at no loss to discover.

The mystery of God, and of the Father and of Christ, being thus subjected to philosophical investigation, and clothed in scholastic terms of Grecian science, a host of heretical tenets sprung up in the eclectic school, as mushrooms after a shower. The gnostics of the former age, now met new adversaries—Plotinus against Adelphius, and Origen against both; and in this dispute the Christian doctrine and spirit alike suffered violence, and anathemas began to be plentifully hurled from combatant to combatant.

AN. 240, 269. As the doctrine of the Trinity was the most inexplicable, on *this* ingenuity ex-

hausted itself. NOETUS broached the heresy of the Patripassians, or the Father suffering in Christ. SABELLIUS followed in a new modification of the same sentiment; and BARYLLUS added different ideas to the same original dogma. Whilst PAUL of SAMOSATA, the father of modern Socinians, explained away the divine persons; allowed only the Son and Spirit to exist in God, as the faculty of reason and activity in man: affirmed that Christ was a mere man, and received this reason from the Father; and by his agency wrought miracles; and that on this account only he might be called God. But all these novelties were wrapped in expressions the most ambiguous, and capable of endless explications. This gave occasion to many an episcopal synod, where these sentiments afforded abundant matter of discussion, and where zeal exhausted itself in canons and fulminations, which put an importance on councils, better reserved for the simpler purposes of spreading the sincere milk of the word.

Though ARIUS was not yet arisen, the shades of heresy, from deism, through all the gradations of Semiarians, Arians, down to Socinianism, were now sown and vegetating. There is nothing new under the sun. Every modern heretic may find a precedent in antiquity. When men become wise above what is written, the sacred mound of truth is broken down, and the waters of error deluge the world.

In this age also arose the wild heresy of the *Manichæans*, which spread with such rapidity

through the Christian world. It came from the East, and was an attempt to unite the doctrines of the Magi with Christianity, as the school of Alexandria with Origen at its head, desired to ingraft Christianity on Platonism.

The doctrines of MANES contained a tissue of absurdities too long and too useless to be repeated, respecting *two originally existing principles of good and evil*; and his rule of life was the most austere imaginable. Every instinct of nature must be suppressed, and every passion extirpated. The body being supposed intrinsically evil, and essentially corrupt, was to be denied every object that could administer convenience or delight.

AN. 251. Another heresy, if a heresy it be deemed, sprung up, of a very singular nature. NOVATIAN, with the most zealous attachment to the Christian orthodox doctrine and duties, by the severity of his discipline became obnoxious. The Church had only excluded from communion for ever, such as *relapsed*. He refused all communion with such as had *once* apostatized in the hour of persecution, or fallen into such offences as were disgraceful to their profession. He did not indeed deny the possibility of repentance and salvation for such persons; but condemned all who received them again into communion; and insisted on re-baptising such, as from other Christian societies having countenanced such admission of the lapsed, wished to join the body of those, who, from the strictness of their discipline, were called the *cathari*,

or pure. I shall by no means justify a practice, I think not countenanced by Scripture, but I can make many allowances for the necessity of peculiar care, when the immense number of the false and unfaithful, so highly disgraced the Christian name; and probably favour and connivance re-admitted multitudes into the communion of the Church, whose conduct and character demanded more watchful attention. I admire the fidelity of Cyprian, in opposing the letters of reconciliation, too easily obtained from the martyrs, and requiring that some solid evidence should be given of their real sorrow and conversion, before the lapsed should be re-admitted to the society of the faithful.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE PRINCIPAL PERSONAGES WHO FLOURISHED IN THE THIRD CENTURY.

ORIGEN,

Born 185—Died about 252.

NEVER, perhaps, existed a character of a cast so uncommon as that of Origen. In piety fervent; in zeal distinguished; from his earliest years a Christian; his morals unimpeachable; an eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake literally; and sealing the truth of a confessor with the sufferings, if not the death of a martyr. Indefatigable in labour, endued with a singular genius, improved by immense erudition, and admired by his cotemporaries as the paragon of science and learning; yet withal, debasing the doctrines of Christianity with the most absurd interpretations, and subjecting them to the dogmas of the platonic philosophy, as if this was the divine key to unlock these treasures of wisdom. He supposed *the outward letter* of Scripture, to be of no spiritual benefit, but as it led to the hidden meaning; and the *whole of revelation to be of little use to those who should understand it only according to the literal sense.*

He taught with his master, Plato, that the human soul was an emanation of the Divine nature; comprehending in it all the principles and elements of truth, human and divine; and these souls pre-existing, and subject to transmigration. The mode in which he spoke of the incarnation of the Son of God, opened a wide door for the admission of the Arian heresy. His high opinion of the powers of the human intellect, and the freedom of the human will, superseded all supernatural influence from the Holy Ghost as unnecessary: and his supposition of the soul's suffering in other bodies, destroyed the idea of eternal punishment as the wages of sin, and left the hope of final restoration to purity and perfection, to set all right at the last. Errors of the most fearful and fatal kind, and subversive of every vital principle of Christianity.

His austerities and manners, were as far from Christian excellence, as his doctrines were from truth and simplicity. To disarm concupiscence he submitted to the most painful operation, and to subdue every bodily craving, he exercised the severest rigour of mortification; familiar with cold, nakedness, and poverty, barefooted, abstaining from wine, and every indulgence; frequent in vigils and fasting, he macerated the body, in order to make a readier course for the shining of *the inward light*, and the access of divine truth. This remarkable severity of manners, contributed greatly to enhance his character for sanctity, as the depths of his philosophic researches exalted his reputation for wisdom: Thus he opened the road to all the

gloomy discipline and follies of monkery; which the spirit of self-righteousness afterwards begat on pride and self-sufficiency; and produced the spawn of hermits and solitaries that peopled the deserts and monasteries, with the useless crew of celibataries.

The school of Alexandria was the chief scene of his labours. He was heard as the oracle of science, honored by all the philosophical sects; and his name in high celebrity among heathens as well as Christians. Nor did the violence committed upon himself prevent his being ordained a presbyter in the church of Alexandria. From thence he travelled to Athens, every where disseminating his Platonic Christianity, and generally admired and revered; attacking every heresy, with the artillery of his profound erudition, and it is said vanquishing with his victorious syllogisms, Beryllus, bishop of Bostria in Arabia, and other heretical teachers, and reclaiming them to the Church; though the victor and the vanquished with such weapons, alike afford miserable specimens of evangelical truth. Indeed even then many of sounder principles disputed his Platonic dogmas as heretical; and his own diocesan of Alexandria, in two councils, deposed and degraded him from the priesthood, for false doctrine. It must be acknowledged that his philosophical Christianity, and Platonic theology, had a grievous dissimilitude with the simplicity which is in Christ, and seemed the very reverse of Paul's determination to know nothing else but Jesus Christ and him crucified, and not to preach with the

enticing words of man's wisdom, but with those which the Holy Ghost teacheth.

By his own account the state of vital Christianity was become very low indeed, and the careless behaviour of Christians truly afflictive. "They "come to Church," saith he, in one of his homilies, "not for instruction but diversion: Some "go out as soon as the lecture is ended, neither "conferring with, nor asking of their pastor any "questions, and others stay not even till the lec-"ture is finished; whilst some pay no attention "to the discourse, but entertain themselves to-"gether in a corner of the church." So that we see the former days were too like our own. Indeed, if the lecture contained nothing but the fashionable, philosophical, allegorical and mystical interpretations of the Platonic school, it could claim little attention; and it is to be feared, that under such tuition, the simplicity of truth must be lost, and its vital spirit evaporated. Such modes of interpreting the Scriptures must have been as unprofitable and absurd, as the unscriptural rules of life, held in high estimation, and recommended as attainments of superior excellence, tended to corrupt the practice of true Christianity.

Greatly therefore as Origen was venerated in his day; eminent for ability, and activity, and closing a long life of profession, with a readiness to suffer every torment for the religion he maintained, his Christianity appears awfully equivocal. No man contributed more to corrupt the simplicity of Gos-

pel truth, and grace; no man opened a wider door to the wildest systems of errors, and doctrines of demons; no man's teaching and example more powerfully paved the way for all monastic follies and abuses; and, if an impartial examination is made of the good or evil arising to Christianity by his labours, and they are weighed in the scale of evangelical truth, the latter will I am sure be found to preponderate in an amazing proportion, and leave very meagre features of a Christian man, or a Christian Divine. How much wood, hay and stubble, may be built on the foundation, with real gold and silver, and precious stones, the day of fire must decide. We shall not through mercy be each other's judges: but when we are writing impartial history we are bound to speak the truth from the heart as far as our best knowledge reaches. I confess, my views of Origen, with all his greatness and universal admiration, leave me very much in doubt of *his* real Christianity, and induce me to entertain a much worse opinion of the Christian world in that day, which could raise such a man on the pedestal of eminence, and hear his rhapsodies with such profound veneration. I wish I could give a more favourable suffrage. There is a Judge who will do right.

CYPRIAN

Elected Bishop,	-	An. 248
Martyred, -	-	258

A far nobler, and less equivocal personage rises into view, the justly honored and faithful Cyprian; whose character Mr. Milner has held up to light

in the most glowing tints of admiration and respect. In many things he is worthy, and merits all the praise he receives. But Cyprian was a man, compassed about, like his fellows, with infirmity. In his office, manifesting the pride of a too unhumbled heart: in his epistles, mixing sentiments highly exceptionable, with observations wise and judicious: and in his visions and miraculous pretensions, far from deserving unlimited credit. Impartiality requires me to note with utter disapprobation, assertions so unscriptural as the following: "There is only one episcopacy; such as are out of "this church have no salvation to hope for."—"A man may be killed, (for the confession of "Christ) but not be crowned (as a martyr) unless "actually in the church,"—meaning that to which Cyprian belonged.—"No baptism is valid, nor "any ordination valid out of this church, or by "any person deemed heretical, though administered in the name of the Father, Son, and "Holy Ghost."—"Baptism in the church always "procures remission of sins."—"Calamities are "to be wished for, as they enable us to merit the "rewards of heaven." It would be tedious to produce other passages equally shocking. And far, very far, am I from believing those pretensions of Cyprian, to which Mr. Milner and many Papists give implicit credit; such as—"Healing the sick "—extinguishing the force of poison—compelling "unclean and wandering spirits, by menaces, to "quit their hold of men—scourging and controlling the foe of mankind—and bringing him to "confess that he is in torments." I am, I own,

little satisfied with the testimony of the fathers of that age. They appear highly superstitious and credulous. The stories of miracles innumerable related by them, carry on the face of them, strong grounds for hesitation. The more I compare them with the Scripture miracles, the less am I disposed to credit them. Nor were the miracle-mongers themselves the kind of men in whom I could expect such powers would reside. Premising these things, I proceed—

Cyprian was by birth a man of family. His fortune was considerable, and his prospects in the world promising. He was bred to the bar; had a literary education; was an admired orator, and though something too rhetorical, not an inelegant writer. His genius was vivid, and his erudition respectable. When he became a Christian, he readily sacrificed all, that he might win Christ. His substance he distributed to the poor, and his talents he devoted to the Church, of which he became a bishop about two years after his conversion: elected, says Pontius Diaconus, his biographer, *plebis favore*, by the favour of the people,* when quite a Neophite. He was also a married man, that being as yet no bar to the episcopal office.

* The power of the people in every church, notwithstanding all prelatical encroachments hitherto, was very great, as Cyprian himself fully acknowledges, Epist. 68. ipsa plebs *maxime* habet potestatem eligendi dignos sacerdotes, vel indignos recusandi. The body of the people have principally the authority to elect worthy ministers of the church, or to reject such as they judge undeserving.

During the persecution of Decius, Cyprian lay concealed; the ravages it occasioned were great, but the apostacy greater. The picture which Cyprian draws of the state of Christianity, preceding this persecution, unless very highly coloured, exhibits a fearful picture of bishops, presbyters, and people; we might justly surmise more modern times had sat for the portrait. The professors, lost in worldly-mindedness and gain; luxury and effeminacy in dress and manners generally prevalent; profaneness without a check; and marriage with infidels common. Quarrels and disputes the most outrageous, rise with all the acrimony of abuse and malignity. Even bishops, not only negligent of their flocks, but utterly deserting them, for pleasure or gain; covetous, fraudulent, usurious. Thus the declension, which had long before commenced in the days of peace and prosperity, advanced with hasty strides, and now called aloud for the sword of a Decius, and the discipline of a Cyprian, to rouse the latent spark of fidelity and zeal, and to restore the decays of preceding generations. Though the conflict seems much less fierce in Africa than in many other places; and Cyprian says, deserves the name of trial, rather than persecution; yet, on the first sound of the edicts of this bloody Emperor, before the magistrate sat, or the informer produced an accusation, crowds of nominal Christians ran to exculpate themselves, and to offer the prescribed sacrifices; too numerous to be all admitted to the proof, they regreted the delay of another day to brand themselves

apostate. Grief and shame blot the record with tears.

At first, Cyprian continued openly to support his own church; and wrote consolatory and exhortative letters to the suffering brethren at Rome: but the persecution raging, the madness of the Pagan populace demanded him for the lions, and he withdrew, according to the Divine command, from the scene of blood.

His retreat, however, prevented not his anxious cares for his own and other suffering churches. Many of his beautiful letters were written during his concealment; and the epistle sent from Rome in answer to his own, breathes a truly divine unction, and informs us, that though some of the great, and even pastors, apostatized, yet a noble body of confessors stood firm against the storm, and held their faith and a good conscience amidst all the sufferings of torture, imprisonment, and death itself. Nor was their tenderness and compassion for the lapsed, a less amiable feature than their labour and desire for their recovery.

His letter to the church of Carthage, bespeaks a wise and experienced Christian. He guards the confessors against *spiritual pride*; and to those who know the human heart, and the deceitfulness of sin, no unnecessary caution; warns them against fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; and mentions the evil conduct and fornication into which some, who had confessed Christ in the face

of torments and death itself, had notwithstanding, afterwards fallen.

His episcopal ideas appear too elevated; yet he disclaims doing any thing without the consent of the whole body of presbyters and people; for, hitherto this right had been preserved, if not inviolate, at least acknowledged. His other letters breathe the same spirit of parental care and watchfulness, and only lose much of their weight and excellence by the visions he records, which, however they might affect his own congregation, strike us probably in a very different light. It will give no weight or dignity to a truly great character, to be a visionary.

What cannot corruption abuse? Even the martyrs too hastily granted letters of conciliation to the lapsed; and the Church, without, consulting their bishop, received them to communion. This Cyprian highly resents; and confesses his triumph in the sufferings of the martyrs, was damped by the disorderly conduct of the confessors who had escaped. Had this been the only instance of prelatical usurpation, I should with Milner join in the condemnation of Mosheim. Every church ought to maintain discipline; and Cyprian, I presume, claimed no more in this respect, than his predecessors had exercised. And surely it was highly for the good of the whole, that some mark of humiliation should rest upon those who had so shamefully denied the Lord of glory. The power assumed by martyrs and confessors, appears highly blameable.

Pride is the native inmate of every bosom; even martyrs may feel its workings. It is well for them as for us, that there is one, who bears the iniquity of our holy things. The blood of atonement need be sprinkled on the expiring corpse of the martyr in flames; but for this *he* would perish, and *they* would be eternal.

An. 250. A schism in the church of Carthage, produced by the election of another bishop, Fortunatus; and the ill behaviour of Novatus and Felicissimus, might justly have grieved a man of lowlier spirit and less elevated sentiments of his own episcopal dignity than Cyprian. But a division of a similar kind in the Church of Rome, occasioned the African bishop a series of still greater troubles and disputes.

The Church of Rome had been destitute of a bishop for upwards of a year, and as the persecution raged there with peculiar violence, it could not fail to expose the pastor, whoever he might be, to severe and immediate conflicts. This for a while suspended a new election to the see. In the mean time, *Novatian*, a Roman presbyter, grew high in the esteem of many of his brethren and the confessors; but admitting into his friendship Novatus, who had quarrelled with Cyprian, and retired from Carthage to Rome, it is said, that at the instigation of his friend, he separated from the Church; to this I cannot give hasty credit, any more than to Cyprian's abuse of Novatus, as a turbulent, ambitious, and immoral character. That

Novatian was a man of most exemplary piety, and in discipline peculiarly rigid, is admitted. He differed from his friend *Novatus* respecting the lapsed, and judged them for ever inadmissible into the Church, whatever signs of repentance they might have given. It is very improbable that such a person would have embraced as a brother one whose conduct had been justly censurable, much more, if openly notorious.

Though the severity of Novatian's discipline might be blameable, yet in his desire to make apostacy more fearful, a good man might err, even in the excess of his jealousy, for the honor of religion. Many of the Romish clergy, especially the confessors, united with him in sentiment. This greatly divided the Romish presbyters, some holding the more lenient doctrine of restoration; Novatian, with his associates, the more rigid sentence of final exclusion. The two parties, therefore, each chose a bishop. Cornelius, of the party opposed to Novatian, is said to be ordained by *sixteen* bishops then at Rome. How sixteen bishops, in the height of such a bloody persecution should be there assembled for that purpose, appears not a little surprising, unless the name of bishop and presbyter being still synonymous, as I suspect, these Roman presbyters or bishops, might choose a successor to the see, and the people approve: for I have not yet observed an instance of foreign bishops presuming to intrude a pastor upon another church, and if they did, this had been a just cause for the very division which ensued. Novatian,

and the presbyters attached to him, not approving the ordination of Cornelius, they placed Novatian over them, it is said, in a very irregular manner. But that does not appear. Eusebius is a miserable voucher, and evidently himself, in this affair, mistakes Novatus for Novatian.

I am the longer on this point, because Mr. Milner calls these the first *dissenters* from the Church, not a tittle of which I can perceive; for *Novatian* was a bishop as truly chosen and ordained, from any thing which appears, as *Cornelius*. He was a man avowedly sound in all the principles of the Gospel doctrine, and concurring in all the discipline of the Church; nay, disposed to carry it to excess; and besides this, there rests not a shadow of accusation against him. As it is impossible to judge of all the grounds of quarrels even among good men now, when we are so much nearer the scene of action, greater must be the difficulty to decide for times so distant, and where we have such partial materials; probably, as is the case in most disputes, there was too much of pride and self-will on both sides, and more yielding, and less obstinacy would have better become Christian bishops. The party of Cornelius prevailed. Cyprian strongly espoused it. Nicostratus, a friend of Novatian at Rome, came into Africa, and was ordained a bishop there over those who now bore the name of Novatians, from the Roman bishop. He is charged with scandalous crimes; but the accusations of enemies are to be received with caution; and a body distinguished by the name of

cathari, or *pure*, and whose discipline was allowedly more rigid than that of other churches, would hardly have appointed a man of scandalous manners for their head. I can mark no ground of declension herein with Mr. Milner. Had there been no other proof than what is called *the Novatian heresy*, or *schism*, I should have been rather struck with the severity of the discipline maintained in the Church, than with any decline of zeal and purity. For the other churches, from whom in this alone the Novatians differed, were even abundantly strict, as appears from Cyprian himself.

Cyprian being returned to the care of the church of Carthage, immediately assembled his brother bishops to heal the breaches which had been made. The dispute between Cornelius and Novatian came before them. Cyprian was the enemy of Novatian, both in respect to the treatment of the lapsed, and because he espoused Novatus, who had preferred Fortunatus to Cyprian at Carthage. The letters of Cornelius were received; the charges against Novatian admitted; and his condemnation pronounced. From the very letter of Cornelius itself, I am strongly persuaded of the falsehoods laid to the charge of Novatian; and if the invalidity of his ordination turned upon his being consecrated, as it is affirmed, "*by persons in a state of intoxication*," I ask no more than the whole tenor and purity of Novatian's conduct, to confute such an accusation. Bad as matters were grown, the bishop of the Cathari, for the credit of his sect, as

well as his own, would surely never have exposed himself to a censure of this kind. The very suggestion gives me a lower opinion of Cornelius.

Novatian and Fortunatus were both condemned by this episcopal synod, and Cyprian triumphed over his rival and ruled in Africa. The Novatians however continued long a body of professing Christians, and I have always been led to suspect, true members of the Church of Christ, and perhaps, the closest walkers with God.

Cyprian, now evidently the first bishop in the Church, for high respect and elevation, informs Cornelius what they had done, and how they had cut off from *the Mother Church* all who presumed to refuse submission to their dominion; and to break that unity which they thought fit to prescribe. The insolence, the abuse, and the condemnation heaped on the devoted heads of all that presumed to differ from a bishop of Carthage, Mr. Milner may excuse, vindicate; I utterly condemn it, fully persuaded, that the peace, the unity and purity of the *true Church*, will be a thousand times better preserved, by leaving our brethren, who may differ from us, to themselves, bearing and forbearing, than by all the anathemas hurled against them by a Cyprian, a Gregory, or a Laud.

The weight of Cyprian, and the increasing party of Cornelius, tended greatly to weaken the division under Novatian. A letter from the Romish Church informed him of the victory they had gained; and contains their solemn avowal, "that

"but one bishop ought to be in the Catholic "Church, as there is but one Holy Ghost;" an expression, to my ears, full of blasphemy; persuaded that the Holy Ghost dwelt in the churches of Philippi and Galatia, with many bishops in each, in as abundant a measure as in Cornelius or Cyprian; and I rather think in a greater: but the strong lines of Popery, and a visible head of the Catholic Church, whose anathemas were to hurl into the dust every opposer to prelatical pride, had now begun to make considerable strides; and no man hitherto had more contributed to this than Cyprian. Being a man of birth, opulence, distinction, able, zealous, really useful in spreading and maintaining the purity of the faith, he rose high on the stilts of episcopal dignity; swayed Africa by his influence; and all the Christian world acknowledged his greatness. He must be a man indeed of singular grace, who, in such a situation, did not feel himself important, and take too much upon him.

The reply of Cornelius to the bishop of Carthage, breathes an acrimony, an insolence and abuse, that speaks as little in favour of the man who could *receive* it with complacence, as of him who could *indite* it in the bitterness of his heart; and they must be sad Christians indeed, whose state I should not prefer to the bishop who could write these letters. We have only an account of the Novatians from their enemies, but this is sufficient to de-

monstrate, however much *they* were in the wrong, that the spirit of Christianity had little to boast of in their persecutors.

The dispute about the lapsed afforded many a cause for epistolary correspondence; and Cyprian's plan is assuredly the most scriptural. But when he writes to Cornelius, as Milner owns, there is much more of the hero than of the saint, fighting for episcopal dignity, and treating all his own and Cornelius's adversaries with such supercilious contempt, bitter enmity, and insolent arrogance, as must exceedingly degrade a Christian man, much more a Christian bishop. On this head, instead of the meekness and patience of Jesus Christ, he displays a spirit so different from what breathes in his general character, that I can only grieve for what I dare not but condemn. How far the abuse and severity with which the Novatians were treated widened the breach, the least reflection and knowledge of the human heart, must suggest: and Mr. Milner allows, with every good man, that, "in a "defection from Christian purity of doctrine, and "where the heads of the Church are in principle "and practice *ungodly*, we may justly suspect the "Lord hath forsaken these, and that his spirit "would rest on those who separated from them." Such suspicion, no doubt, Novatian and his brethren entertained, however mistaken they might be; and the uncharitableness with which they were treated, would have no tendency to heal their suspicions.

NOVATIAN, by his revilers, is admitted to be a man of genius, learning and eloquence. His moral character was unimpeachable. It required singular excellence to maintain himself and his congregation, against the weight of power and influence which were against him. One of the best, clearest, and most precise treatises which antiquity can produce, on the triune God, comes from his pen. He states distinctly, that, "the Holy Ghost is the "author of regeneration—the pledge of the pro- "mised inheritance—the hand-writing of eternal "salvation—who makes us the temple of God, "and his abode—who intercedes for us with "groanings which cannot be uttered—our advo- "cate and defender—dwelling in us—and sancti- "fying us for immortality," &c. When I hear Cyprian anathematizing such a man, I can only say, that I would rather be under the curses with Novatian, than utter them with Cyprian. I forbear to quote the high expressions, to me bordering on impiety, with which he honors the episcopal order, and from whence he derives the claims of obedience; this seems the great blot in his escutcheon, and the cause of all the indefensible severity with which he treated those who presumed to differ from him. His noble career, after a life of unwearied labour, terminated as became him, in a death of martyrdom under Valerian, AN. 258. In the same persecution, his antagonist, shall I say his enemy, Novatian (but a Christian should have no enmities) closed his noble efforts also, with a like glorious end; and shewed with many

of his followers, that however they might differ from their brethren in lesser matters, they could as faithfully die for Christ, and claim the crown of martyrdom. Ah! that great men, good men, confessors, martyrs, should ever quarrel, and not be willing to bear and forbear! If one is our master, even Christ, to him let us be content to be responsible; follow the best dictates of our conscience according to our views of God's word; and be happy to indulge our brethren with the same liberty. The preservation of the unity of an *outward church*, in the eyes of a spiritually minded man, must be contemptible, compared with the holding the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and loving one another out of a pure heart fervently. Cyprian and Novatian, at the right hand of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, must be ashamed of their harsh spirit, and their harsh speeches. It is a mercy for us all, that we have such a compassionate High-Priest, who knows how to pity our infirmities, and to pardon our iniquities.

As I have dwelt so long on a character, which then engaged the first attention, I shall only just mention two persons, highly (I will not add deservedly) revered, Gregory Thaumaturgus, bishop of Neocesaria, and Firmilian, bishop of Cappadocia, the pupils of the famous Origen, and deeply tinctured with all the eclectic philosophy. The creed which the latter miraculously received from John the Evangelist and the Virgin Mary, ranks with

the visions of Cyprian. And as to the abundance of miraculous gifts of Thaumaturgus, I must have better evidence than Gregory of Nyssen and Basil, a hundred years after, ere I can receive them. The one sentence before quoted from Gregory, diminishes grievously his Christian character, and weighs against a multitude of traditionary reports, at such a distance from the date of the facts: and without a living witness, or a single authentic and credible testimony at the time. That these men were acute and able disputants, and followed up the socinian, Paul of Samosata, through all his windings of ambiguity and dexterous evasion, I can suppose. This triumph they shall be allowed, and I will not impeach the justice of his deposition. But I am utterly dissatisfied with the proof Mr. Milner brings of the abundance of Gregory's miraculous powers, and believe just as much of them, as of much better ones, related in Mr. Wesley's journals. Good men may be tinctured with credulity, and really be deceived themselves before they attempt to deceive others. I see no danger the truth of Christianity can receive from suspending our belief of Gregory's miracles; I see a great door opened for fraud and superstition in the admission of them.

I must pass over more slightly a numerous host who shone in that firmament, as stars of lesser magnitude; yet, perhaps, in spirit and temper more like their Lord, than the greater and more distinguished polemics. Hippolitus, Julius Africanus, Dionysius of Alexandria, Methodius, Minu-

tius Felix, Arnobius, all have left us writings; and are delivered down to us, as the successful defenders of the Christian cause. Indeed it was now universally prevalent; but as we have seen, by awful experience, the professors were more than the possessors, though they also were a great host, as the host of God.

CHAPTER IV.

FORM OF GOVERNMENT, RITES AND CEREMONIES.

THE government of the several churches, in an enlarged circle, was now consolidated under one head, with magisterial authority. The bishop, however, still consulted his presbyters, and the congregation of the faithful in matters of moment, relative to his church; such as the distribution of the offerings; the ordination of ministers; the exclusion of members from, and their admission to the Lord's table. One bishop also had great pre-eminence over his fellows; summoned councils; presided at their deliberations, and usually swayed their opinions; such was Cyprian in Africa. Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, claimed a sort of pre-eminence for their antiquity, and on difficult matters were consulted: though the bounds of metropolitan, or episcopal authority fluctuated, according to the ability, reputation or ambition of the person who filled the see. The bishop of the great metropolis began to claim, and was generally now admitted to hold a certain priority of dignity above his *fellows*; for equality respecting *order* and office was yet jealously maintained by the episcopal band: And therefore, when Stephen, bishop of Rome, issued his mandate, respecting the baptism of heretics, Cyprian rebuked his insolence, with equal

indignation and contempt; but whilst the bishops watched with jealousy the ambitious encroachments of their companions in office, each endeavoured to extend his claims successfully in his own church; and was supported by the spirit of the corps in his pretensions. They assumed every day more of absolute rule in their own sees, trenching upon the rights of the presbyters, and excluding the interference of the faithful. These were now taught implicit obedience, and heard the constant warnings of the deadly crime of resisting episcopal authority, seated upon the throne of God, and claiming divine right and submission. The evils necessarily resulting from such a spirit, and such abuses, must be incalculable; and appeared in the pride, pomp, luxury and carnality of many of these prelatical dignitaries. The other orders endeavoured to imitate them in lording it over their inferiors; and claiming their superior honors of sacerdotal reverence. Even the deacons usurped many of the presbyters' offices, and, in the useless and multiplied rites and ceremonies instituted in the Church, appointed beneath them a herd of inferior orders, sub-deacons, acolothists, door-keepers, readers, exorcists, and buriers of the dead, all which strengthened the clerical army with their subordinate functions; and were supposed to share a minor portion of their sanctity.

Though marriage was still generally used, a state of celibacy continued to acquire a degree of reputation; and monkery, the offspring of the Platonic philosophy, and promoted by the great

oracle, Origen, expanded its roots, and peopled the deserts, far from the haunts of men.

The sacraments also, instead of simple memorials, and outward signs of inward and spiritual grace, began to be supposed to have divine grace necessarily attached to them, and to acquire a value, which they had not before attained, becoming so indispensably necessary to salvation that even to infants the communion should be administered. There does not yet appear any dispute *whether* the children of Christians should be baptized, but *at what time*, and if, like the rite of circumcision, it should be administered on the eighth day. This *momentous* question employed the wisdom of Cyprian and sixty-six bishops to decide. His reasonings on the efficacy of baptism are as unscriptural, as the disputes about the re-baptising heretics were frivolous: as Cyprian insisted on this point, the war was carried on with scandalous asperity; and he was solemnly excommunicated by the bishop of Rome. In times of declension, trifles become important, and the *mode* of, and *time* for baptism, the sign of the cross, and the proper day for observance of Easter, were matters as violently contested, as if the foundations of all truth and godliness were about to be razed. Ah! when will good men learn to leave modes and forms in their proper place; to give secondary matters less of their polemics; and reserve the weight of their arguments and zeal for the great essential truths and the real conversion of the heart to God.

Long sermons, full of trope, figure and allegory, with an affectation of Grecian eloquence, were introduced by the school of Origen, and tended greatly to debase the simplicity of Christian truth. Incense now first smoked on what began to be called the altar. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was celebrated with greater pomp and solemnity. Gold and silver vessels were used in the service, with garments for beauty and glory; supposing these would command greater reverence and respect for the sacred mysteries. They began also to speak of the elements after consecration, in a language which laid the foundation for the gross and impious doctrine of transubstantiation, and by degrees proceeded, though after a course of ages, from veneration to adoration, and from high mystical flights, to suggest a *real* body of Christ in the eucharist.

Before admission to *baptism*, the exorcist with frightful menaces and formidable shouts, pretended to expel the prince of darkness from the candidate. The remission of sins was thought to be the immediate effect of baptism, rightly administered by the bishop or his delegate. By his subsequent prayer and imposition of hands (for his presence on those occasions was always necessary) the Holy Ghost was supposed to be given. These baptismal solemnities were reserved for the great festival of Easter, and the forty days succeeding. A solemn parade and procession of the exorcised and baptised, in white garments and crowns, in token of their victory over the devil,

closed the august ceremonial. Every step we advance, betrays the growing declension, and the loss of true Christianity, in forms and ceremonies, and the tricks of jugglers to give importance to a new-invented priesthood.

Fasting also grew into high estimation. The Platonic doctrine of demons generally taught and believed, introduced all the absurdities of spells and exorcisms; and as bodily macerations were supposed of peculiar efficacy, and the demons less troublesome to those who were lean and hungry, than to such as had a belly full, all were put under discipline; and the degree of sanctity increased in proportion to the rigor of the fast and the mortifications imposed on the body. Days of fasting were enjoined by bishops and councils, and multiplied; and sharp and bitter contentions followed, whether it should be on the sixth or seventh day of the week. Such astonishing puerilities could engage the attention of the most exalted characters! and in aid of other mighty weapons against the powers of darkness, the sign of the cross began very generally to prevail, and Christians undertook nothing of moment without this important precaution.

Prayers were universally offered thrice a-day, according to the custom of the Jews, as well as at other times, occasionally by the faithful; and justly reckoned among the most important duties. On festivals, the general mode was *to stand*; on days of fasting and humiliation, *to fall on their knees*, or

prostrate on the ground. Forms of prayer began to be introduced, but no ritual generally established. Every man was yet at liberty to express the sensations of his mind in free and unrestrained effusions, and to speak out of the abundance of the heart.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRUE SPIRITUAL CHURCH.

STRONG as the flames of persecution burned around the church and its martyrs, and shed a glory on the noble army of confessors, anguish of heart traces the growing corruptions, which in every interval of peace and quiet prevailed. Truth compels me to relate what I find recorded in the writers of that day; yet though the rubbish now began to disfigure the sanctuary, there appears in numberless instances, a genuine spirit of zeal for Christ, and fidelity to his service.

The doctrines, which are according to godliness, may be found in the great number of the writings of that age; and the zeal to suppress heresy appears in the multiplied treatises on that subject. But I dare not enter upon these. The reasonings they contain are so often fallacious and inconclusive; the sophistry so apparent, and the contest rather for victory than truth, that the dispute is very unprofitable; and this also managed with such asperity and invective, that I rather quit the arena to the ecclesiastical combatants, and their interested disciples, and retire to seek the faithful, not so much among the more distinguished characters, as with the simple followers of the crucified Lord; who, less noticed for dignity, learning,

and worldly respect, lifted up to him in their inferior stations, holy hands, without wrath or doubting.

With all the mixtures of what was evidently wrong, the body of the Church held fast the head Christ. Cyprian, with all his inexcusable loftiness and asperity, displays the most solid piety and judicious observations. His labours must have been greatly blessed; the revival of Christianity from the low condition in which he found it, so as to be able to assemble sixty-six neighbouring bishops around him, bespeaks a very flourishing estate of the African church. And when we see his own sufferings, and those of a multitude of others, we cannot but highly venerate the men who dared thus to count their lives not dear unto themselves. I can have no doubt that many of these African bishops, were men of true primitive simplicity of manners, and devotedness to God our Saviour. Their dioceses could be but of small extent, and their care of the flock was exemplary. Assuredly in many of them, whose names are not come down on the register of reputation, the true Church of Christ subsisted in its vigour; and among them I might perhaps be less incredulous, if I could find the attestation of miraculous powers, than in those who affected them. A great host of living witnesses was found of those who knew the power of Christ's resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. Nor can I confine the *Church* to the pale of those who appropriated to themselves the title of *Catholic*. I have no doubt that the Novatians

were a blessed company of faithful people, and in strictness of life and manners equal at least to those who excommunicated them; and among the other sects, with all the mistakes into which sophistry or education might have led many, there were still some who held the Lord Christ; worshipped him in spirit and in truth; and died, as we are assured, as readily for their confession of him, as they had lived in holy obedience to him.

The unhappy idea of *the unity of the Church under a particular mode of government*, instead of unity of spirit, meekness, and mutual forbearance, in matters unessential to salvation, whilst all professed to hold the faith once delivered to the saints, produced the plenteous tares of controversy, and the abhorred mutual excommunications of men, whose duty was to love one another out of a pure heart fervently; but whose corruptions too often prevailed about trifles, over the spirit of charity and of a sound mind. Yet multitudes, below controversy, and removed to the obscurer scenes of life, incapable of judging of all the learned nonsense, and unaffected with the asperities of the disputes, quietly pursued their way to heaven and glory, through sanctification of the spirit unto obedience, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Let it be mentioned, ere I conclude, to the honor of many, that they spared no expence or trouble to obtain multiplied copies of the word of God: a work then of no small difficulty, and a treasure of the value of which we are incompetent

judges, who, since the art of printing has been invented, can so easily, and for a trifle, procure what was then so hard to obtain.

Thus have we approached the close of the third important century. Many woes are past, and one yet to come, under the Pagan Roman Emperors, to separate the chaff from the wheat: and chaff in abundance was now found in God's threshing-floor. A long scene of comparative ease, and prosperity—the unchristian disputes which prevailed—the growing importance of clerical men—as if the church consisted of a peculiar tribe—the vast prevalence of the profession of Christianity—the easier admission than formerly within the pale—and the declension both in conduct and care, evident in the complaints of the censurers of those times—for, as Milner observes, ambition and covetousness had now pretty generally the ascendancy in the Christian nominal Church—All these and many other evidences, bespoke a very declining state of spiritual religion, and demonstrated of the many called, then as now, how few were really chosen. When church rulers appear more anxious to establish their own weight and authority, than to promote the power of godliness; and exhaust their zeal in frivolous disputes and haughty anathemas, instead of mildness, and with compassion, bearing the infirmities of the weak, and charitably yielding in matters not essential to salvation, the Church must suffer in its best interests.

But notwithstanding all offences, Christianity was now rising to universal empire. The system,

both in its principles and practice, was so superior to paganism: and after the school of Alexandria arose to meet the philosophic sects with weapons drawn from their own armoury, the folly and falsehood of the established superstitions were completely demonstrated, and contempt poured on the rabble of pagan deities, the objects of popular devotion. Christianity, also, in the garb of platonism, lost many of its most revolting features in the eyes of the rationalists, and they more easily abandoned a religion, which before they did not themselves believe; and gods, whose conduct must excite horror and disgust, instead of adoration. Thus, without ever tasting the grace of God in truth, multitudes, even of the wiser heathens and philosophers, became converts to the profession of Christianity, and swelled the number of deserters from paganism. In vain Celsus, Porphyry, Lucian, whetted their weapons of argument or ridicule; the more the matter became the subject of examination, the more the Christian apologists triumphed; and numbers of the learned, and superior casts, as they are esteemed in the world, joined the banner of the cross; but these were far from the ornaments or living stones in the spiritual temple. The church, nominally, was always as at present, a mixed multitude. Of the wise, the mighty, the noble, however numerous the professors of Christ, few were ever found really faithful. The gate of heaven is too strait, and the road too narrow for them to enter.

Christians now were not debarred from honors and offices: the Emperor's court was filled with them: the army composed of Christian professors, both officers and soldiers; and many held high civil employments. The churches, no longer able to contain the crowds of worshippers, were enlarged and multiplied. The Pagan altars were abandoned to the priests that attended them; and trembling, expected the stroke of their final demolition. The living few rejoiced to see the casting down of Satan's empire in the idolatrous world, whilst they lamented the prevailing abominations among those who bore the Christian name; and the pride, worldliness, self-indulgence, contentions, careless walking, and loss of vital godliness, too strongly marked in the priesthood, as well as people. We should greatly err, if we thought the former days were better than our own. I believe, with some fluctuations, great declensions and alternate revivals, Christianity subsists now, as in the days of the Apostles. The glory of the Lord then evidently appeared—it spread to the ends of the earth. The truth as it is in Jesus, hath ever since had its confessors, and often its martyrs; but oftener those, who had only a name to live and are dead. Numbers enlisted in the ranks, who never proved themselves faithful servants of the great Captain of salvation, by manfully fighting under his banner, against sin, the world and the devil. Then, as now, the many endeavoured to reconcile the incompatible services of both worlds; and in that case it will be no longer doubtful which of the two masters, God or Mammon, will prevail.

But there was and ever will be, a remnant according to the election of grace, against whom the gates of hell, with all its fury, shall never prevail; and whom false science and philosophy shall never deceive nor pervert from the simplicity which is in Christ.

SECTION V.

TO THE ACCESSION OF CONSTANTINE.

CENTURY IV.—PART I.

CHAPTER I.

DIOCLESIAN'S PERSECUTION.

THE morning of the fourth century opened with a gleam of sun-shine, and Dioclesian's peaceful protection promised a continuance of the Church's halcyon days. A few drops had fallen in the last years of the preceding century, which threatened a storm; but it had blown over. The death of Marcellus, whether considered as Gibbon represents it, a punishment for an act of military disobedience; or rather, proceeding, as it appears, from his Christian fidelity, in not submitting to some heathen rites, contrary to his conscience, had not been attended with any general persecution. It was in the commencement of the fourth century, that the volcano which had long emitted only smoke, or a passing flame, burst again the moun-

tain with redoubled violence, and the burning lava spread desolation on every side.

An. 285—293. The Roman Empire was now under the dominion of four; for Dioclesian had associated Maximian to share with him the cares of government, and by each of these a successor had been chosen; Galerius by Dioclesian, and Constantius Chlorus by Maximian. These four had divided the empire between them. Dioclesian and Galerius occupied the East, and Africa. Maximian and Constantius the West. Gaul and Britain fell to the care of the latter. Dioclesian himself had been long indifferent to all religions, though naturally superstitious, and professing paganism. Maximian was a brute in nature. Chlorus was a man of candor; and though no Christian, not a polytheist. He kept his portion of the empire undisturbed. But Galerius fostered a rooted enmity to Christianity, and breathed nothing but fury and slaughter against all the men of that way. It is supposed his mother, a bigotted Pagan, and governed by her priests, had instilled into him an inveterate hatred against the Christian name. Coming to pass the winter with his adopted father at Nicomedia, he used all his influence with the aged Emperor, himself a dupe to superstition, and now more than ever influenced by the pagan priests, to extirpate, if possible, the Christians root and branch, and to revive the expiring glory of paganism: but the wise and more crafty Dioclesian, sensible of the immensity of those who must be devoted to destruction, reluctantly.

yielded to the measures of violence, and preferred the more cautious steps of suppressing their assemblies, and intimidating their leaders.

Galerius hoped, if the work of persecution were but once seriously commenced, the current would soon run with violence irresistable. He spent the winter at Nicomedia with Dioclesian, in planning the execution of his diabolical design. The great church of Nicomedia was the first object of vengeance, as a prelude to the razing all the rest. The first edict enjoined the suppression of Christian worship, and the seizure and delivery of all their sacred books, in order to commit them to the flames. Many eluded the edict, and concealed the sacred treasures, whilst some, bishops and presbyters, to avoid the threatened ruin, gave up their holy Scriptures, and were branded by the zealous, as *traditores*, or traitors. AN. 303.

The church at Nicomedia being levelled to the ground, and other sacred edifices sharing the same fate, a second edict issued, depriving every Christian of all preferment, honor, or dignity in the state or army. Men might have an appeal to the laws against *them*, whilst they were excluded from their protection, and exposed to every insult with impunity. A daring disciple, whose zeal prompted him to pull down the unjust decree, was seized and burnt alive.

As the measures yet adopted were not fully correspondent to the sanguinary spirit of Galerius,

he caused, as Lactantius asserts, the palace of Dioclesian to be set on fire, and then accused the Christians as having done it in revenge, and with a malicious design to destroy both the Emperors. The too credulous Dioclesian became infuriate at the accusation, and Nicomedia flowed with the blood of martyrs, as incendiaries. Dioclesian's wife and daughter, suspected of favouring Christianity, were compelled to sacrifice: the eunuchs of his court, and the officers of the army were the first victims. The bishops and principal presbyters were seized, and conveyed to prison; and another edict compelled them by every torture, to sacrifice to the gods; hoping their example would effectually influence their flocks. Some purchased their lives by base compliance; but many endured all the severity of torture, and death itself, rather than deny their Lord; more were buried alive in the mines, to expire in hard labour, bondage, and poverty.

But the fidelity of the martyrs and confessors being unconquerable, their sufferings rather confirmed the faithful, and confounded, probably converted, many of their enemies. A fourth edict therefore came forth at the instigation of Galerius, commanding the magistrates without distinction of age, sex, or station, to torture even to death; to use every wile or cruelty to make the Christians apostatize, and to slay the obstinate. Nor could any thing short of that Almighty arm which can support the feeble, and subdue the proudest, have prevented the utter subversion of the Christian Church.

It would be endless to particularize the sufferings of multitudes, recorded by the martyrologists, who braved every torment, which the most diabolical malice, and insensate cruelty could invent. Humanity recoils at the recital of such atrocities, and turns away afflicted from the groans of the tortured, and the convulsions of the dying. Promiscuous slaughter of all ranks and ages dyed the fields with blood—an entire city was given up to flames and the sword—and where policy, shocked at its own devastation, wished to spare useful subjects, maimed and lacerated, they were condemned to slavery; to dig in the mines, or perish with the severity of labour. Sacrifice or suffer, was the only alternative. Instigated by the orders of the inhuman tyrants, as well as goaded by the priesthood around them, the magistrates with zeal vied with each other in the execution of every brutal edict; and throughout the Eastern empire, and part of the West, the name of Christ was menaced to be had no more in remembrance. But amidst the fearful apostacy of many, Christ was to others dearer than life and all its comforts, and chosen as a portion, in the face of death, and all its terrors. A noble army of martyrs peopled the mansions of glory provided for them, and from their blood sprang up a numerous host of confessors, ready to step into the ranks, under the great Captain of salvation, and dare to die.

I am surprised that with the evidence which remains, men of credit, who boast the sincerity of historic truth, can wish to suppress, or so unfairly

misrepresent, facts, that meet us throughout the vast extent of all the empire, and prove in the multitude of the sufferers the constancy of the saints; but some men hate the light, and feel an implacable enmity against the crucified Galilean: yet conquer he must.

AN. 305. Galerius, ambitious as cruel, had now perfected his scheme to seize the empire from his associates. Dioclesian and Maximian he compelled to resign their dignity, waiting for the entire dominion, on the death of Chlorus, whose ill state of health soon promised his rival that gratification. Meantime he associated to himself in the cares of empire, Maximin his sister's son.

Constantius Chlorus drawing near his end in Britain, solicited Galerius to send him his son Constantine, who was kept as an hostage at court. The request was refused by the crafty Emperor, and Constantine, sensible of the danger of his situation, determined to attempt his escape. Accordingly, he seized a moment of opportunity, and to prevent pursuit, is said to have killed all the post horses on his route. His arrival at York was but just announced, when the dying Constantius expired, and the army, without waiting to consult Galerius, immediately pronounced Constantine Emperor of the West in the room of his father. Thus, in the very moment, when the light of Israel was threatened with extinction, had God provided a protector for his afflicted Church. AN. 306.

Galerius heard with indignation an event so contrary to his ambitious designs; and, compelled to suppress for a while the vengeance he meditated, he reluctantly confirmed the purple to *him*, whom he hoped soon to strip of this imperial ornament.

Meantime a spirit of division was sown among the wicked. Galerius and Maxentius, who had succeeded Maximian in Italy, quarrelled. Thus weakened, Constantine first attacked Maxentius, defeated him, and seized Rome, the capital of the world. Whilst Galerius, struck by the hand of the great Avenger, perished by a lingering disease, tormenting as the pangs he had made the Christians feel, but destitute of their supports. AN. 312.

CONSTANTINE, who, with his father, had ever favored the Christians, now openly appeared their protector. And, as Galerius had, before his death, whether from policy to conciliate the Christians to his government, or from the horrors of a guilty and tormenting conscience, suspended all the edicts, and restored freedom of worship, and repose to the disciples of Jesus, the world at last saw the arm of cruelty broken, and the banners of the cross erected in peace. Maximin, the successor of Galerius, who made a feeble effort to renew the scenes of blood, and with a craft perhaps yet more dangerous than violence, sought to destroy the child Jesus and his cause; himself arrested in his career, soon fell by the sword of his colleague, Licinius. And he shortly after yielded the purple to the all conquering genius of Constantine: who thus be-

came the undisturbed possessor of the entire Roman empire, both East and West. So did the Lord, after ages of sharp persecution, preserve his church and people, amidst the fires that had been kindled around them; and with his own right hand and his mighty arm, get to himself the victory: and thus doth the God of providence and grace still direct and over-rule all events, and the hearts of men, so as ultimately to accomplish his own eternal purposes. Nor is it less a mark of his universal dominion, that the instruments employed, were often very far from sharing themselves the real benefits of that Christianity, which they were the means of establishing. AN. 313—323.

CHAPTER II.

CONSTANTINE.

CONSTANTINE, the first Roman Emperor who professed Christianity, is usually, among many other distinguished characters, surnamed the GREAT. A nobler appellation would have been the GOOD, but he merited it not. Human admiration attaches itself to outward distinctions, and the title *great*, as far as my observation reaches, usually marks the most destructive, the most tyrannical, and the most murderous of mankind; and I am sorry to say, I can see no more of true Christianity in Constantine, than in Henry the VIIIth; and am as little satisfied either with the principles or fidelity of his historian Eusebius, who blazons his fame with the strongest colouring. Whatever obligations the church has to *him*, as great probably had he to the *Christians*; and policy, as likely as conviction, directed his conduct. I wish I could say otherwise; as it is, I must speak the truth as it appears. The cause of God will never suffer by the unworthiness of those who have espoused it upon principles very different from the purity of the gospel.

Constantius, his father, had no doubt communicated to him his own views. He despised the gods of heathenism. Disposed to tolerate all re-

ligions, under the influence of sceptical principles, he could not but observe the excellence and fidelity of the Christian character; and therefore like many others, though no Christian himself, he preferred them in his household, court, and army, where they enjoyed protection, and prayed for the prosperity of their humane sovereign. The vast increase of Christians also, could not but make it a considerable object among those who were contending for empire, to secure such a body in their interest by toleration, rather than to exasperate them by persecution: and to this we see the most bitter and malicious driven, in the last decrees of Galerius and Maximin.

The empire to which Constantine was advanced, demanded from him, as much as possible, to strengthen himself and weaken his enemies; and therefore his interest herein concurred with his inclinations to favor the long persecuted but wide spreading professors of the Christian name. I can see no evidence that Constantine was at all a Christian at his accession to the empire. It rather appears, even after his victory over Maxentius, that he considered all religions as alike, and useful to mankind; and though he tolerated Christianity, and admitted its public worship, he left all parties the same liberty, and attached himself as yet decisively to neither.

I am sorry to differ from such excellence as I respect in Christian historians; but I have received no conviction from any thing I have yet read, respecting the miracle of the cross in the sky, and

the vision of Christ to Constantine the subsequent night, any more than of the thundering legion of Adrian. I will not say it was impossible; nor deny that the Lord might manifest himself to him in this extraordinary way; but the evidence is far from being conclusive, and I can hardly conceive a man of his character would be thus singularly favored. That such a report might have a great effect upon the Christian soldiers in both armies, I can well conceive, and tend powerfully to secure the object he had in view. A dream he might have had, and have mentioned it; and his banner conduce to the victory which he gained. Had the fact been as reported, ten thousand witnesses of his army would have rendered his own oath to Eusebius unnecessary. Did Eusebius himself doubt? or was such a testimony needful to establish a report so well known, if founded in truth; or did Eusebius think it for the honor of Christianity, and press this as a miracle into the service? Historians of as good credit as Eusebius, Rufinus and Sozomen, seem to question the fact, by not reporting it. And were it a reality, Constantine must have been still more criminal, to sin against such conviction, and take no decided part with the professors of the religion of Jesus, and not immediately join in their worship and assemblies. Nothing of which appears till long after.

Become the conqueror of Maxentius, and as it seems chiefly by the support of Christians, his favour to them increased in great munificence to build them churches, and in abounding liberality

to their poor. Their bishops were honored by him and caressed; and their synods held and supported by his authority. Licinius had taken a contrary party; as his rival, Constantine, openly protected and cherished the Christians, he persecuted and oppressed them. He courted the priests of the ancient superstition, and endeavoured to strengthen his authority by the support of his pagan subjects. The matter thus was at issue; the cross prevailed, and paganism fell with Licinius.

Having now no longer a competitor, Constantine resolved to take the most decided part with the Christians. He prohibited the heathen sacrifices, and shut up the temples, or converted them to the purposes of Christian worship. He universally established Christianity, and tolerated no other religion openly throughout the bounds of his empire: the justice of which I doubt, and even the policy. I see no right to compel even an idolater, contrary to his conscience.

That Constantine might be sincere in his preference of Christianity to all other religions, there is little reason to dispute; nor does it much signify, whether he was sincere or a hypocrite in his profession, if his heart was not right with God, and he never walked stedfastly in his covenant. That such was his state, appears upon the clearest and most decisive evidence. He waded to empire through seas of blood; his nearest relatives were sacrificed to his ambition. Nothing in his whole life discovers a trace of real conversion to God;

and his latter days were the most oppressive and tyrannical of his government. The deferring his baptism might be excused by the superstition of the times, though that is an awful excuse. But the whole tenor of his life, except favouring bishops, building churches, enriching them with wealth and finery, and other very equivocal marks of Christianity, displays no trait of a Christian character, or a Christian hero. His very choice of such a man as Eusebius of Cesarea, for his spiritual director, is a miserable proof of any Christian discernment, or scriptural views of God our Saviour; and his baptism, by so heterodox a bishop as that of Nicomedia, a few days before his death, leaves as dark a cloud upon his latter end as on his beginning.

The bounties he bestowed; the zeal he displayed; his liberal patronage of episcopal men; the pomp he introduced into worship; and the power invested with general councils, made the Church appear great and splendid: but I discern not a trace in Constantine of the religion of the Son of God. As an outward professor, and for an outward Church, no man more open, more zealous: as a partaker of the grace of God in truth, either in genuine repentance for his crimes, or real newness of life, I want abundantly better evidence than I can see in Eusebius; who, like many a courtly bishop, is very cordially disposed to exalt on a pedestal, the king that patronizes and increases their power, wealth, and dignity.

I believe Constantine chose to die in the profession of Christianity, as the true religion; and from some of its doctrines, ill understood, expected to be saved at last by the water of baptism: to which ignorance and superstition had now pretty fully annexed the remission of sins; as the Popish viaticum at last clears all scores, and sends men off with extreme unction safe to St. Peter; but every one who has truly learned Christ, sees nothing in all this the least conclusive of a real Christian, or that Constantine died other than he had lived. It may be admitted, that he was a formal religonist, a nominal believer in revelation; a zealous friend to the Church; and flattered by Eusebius and his fellows with the hope of heaven through the water of baptism; but not a trait appears that his heart was divinely converted, or the spirit of his mind renewed by the power of the Holy Ghost.

I am as persuaded that his establishment of Christianity, and of those bishops, whom, particularly at last, he most espoused and favoured, contributed beyond any thing to the awful debasement and declension of true religion: and from him and his son Constantius, evangelical truth suffered in the spirit of the Christian professors, as much as their persons had undergone from Dioclesian or Galerius.

To those who look to the flourishing state of the Church, in exaltation, honor, and general establishment, Constantine may appear a Christian

hero; a great emperor; a nursing father: to those who look to the *man*, they will see at best a very dubious character, whose morals were a disgrace to the profession of Christianity; and whose principles, if he ever had any, were those of education; and so far as Eusebius was his spiritual guide, grievously suspicious. Even admitting his acknowledgment of the doctrines and forms of worship sincere, it is impossible not to see, that his choice was politically wise, and that the interest of the Christian party contributed to seat him on the empire of the world. I would rather have been the meanest Christian in a cottage, than CONSTANTINE THE GREAT.

CHAPTER III.

THE PREVAILING HERESIES.

NOVATIANISM still maintained its ground, and, as far as I can see, with exemplary purity of doctrine and conduct. The rising pompous Church began to eclipse all who basked not in the sunshine of imperial favour; probably these fell into contempt and oblivion, few, and of no reputation; and rising to no height of episcopal dignity or eminence, they were suffered quietly to walk with God, and to be blessed, unnoticed and unknown. But another schism, as more novel, excited more attention in the famous church of Carthage. On account of the election of a bishop to that see, a dissatisfaction, from whatever cause, prevailed; and the opposite party, under the patronage of a wealthy lady, named Lucilla, and supported by Donatus, with whom a multitude of African bishops concurred, and in a great council deposed Cæcilian, and placed Majorinus, a friend of Donatus, in the see of Carthage. Which of the contending parties was right or wrong it would be difficult to determine: probably both were equally blameable, and were more swayed by pride and passion, than by the spirit of peace and purity. Donatus and his party, however, had no favour at court, which, in my view of them, does not convey any disgrace. The Emperor, on the contest being brought before

him, condemned the Donatists, and confiscated their churches. Had the decision turned against Cæcilian, he would have been the dissenter. However, after various acts of persecution and banishment, the Emperor indulged the Donatists with toleration, of which, Mr. Milner says, they made an unworthy use. I hesitate always to believe the report of enemies. The Donatists might be wrong, but men, who to follow the dictates of conscience, refuse to travel in the road of honor and emoluments, have in the scale of Christianity some presumptive evidences in their favour. An. 314.

An. 316. Meletius, an Egyptian bishop, deposed by Peter of Alexandria, formed a separate body of Christians, who bore his name; not accused of having corrupted the Christian doctrine or discipline; and only, as it seems, differing from Alexander, the succeeding patriarch, who was too rigid in the point of heretical baptism; in which Meletius was in sentiment with the orthodox church. These episcopal squabbles for superiority and dominion, were equally the disgrace of all who were concerned in them. Can we permit no man to differ from us, or choose his own mode of worship, without excommunications and anathemas? They made the heresies and schism, who with weapons, not of our warfare, thus fight with their brethren. The true Church, in spirit and in life, will often be found, I am persuaded, among the excommunicated, and those branded as schismatical.

AN. 320. A fouler plague, and of more fatal consequence, by the extent and continuance of the contagion, burst forth from ARIUS, a presbyter of the church of Alexandria. A man of science, grave deportment, irreproachable manners, and an acute disputant. He was of the school of Origen, the prolific father of heresy, the offspring of false philosophy and human reasonings. The famous Eusebius had trod in the same crooked path, and his platonic system had begun to degrade the Son, from *co-equality*, whilst he seemed to admit *co-eternity* with the father. Arius advanced with a larger stride, asserting, that before he was begotten, he had *no existence*; that he *had a beginning*, and was created from *non-existence*. Yet Arius used such ambiguous and high-sounding titles of veneration, adoration, and deity, as to cast a mist over the degrading debasement, with which he wished to invelope our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Proud reasoners from that day to this, from Origen to Doctor Priestly, have moved downwards through all the gradations and shades of distinction, between *essential deity*, and the *mere man* Christ Jesus: but the difference is vastly less important than it appears. The infinite distance between *self-existent* and *created* godhead, renders every subsequent gradation from a nominal god to no god at all, inconsiderable. The first step is the essential heresy. Dr. Clarke is as much a blasphemer as Socinus. As none can adequately know the things of God but the Spirit of God, we display as much our pride as our folly, when we presume to comprehend fully either the nature

of God, or the mode of his existence. The imbecility of the human intellect reaches not these deep things of God: and whoever, vainly puffed up of his fleshly mind, supposes the exertions of his natural reason fully equal to the perfect comprehension of all revealed truth, will ever grope for the wall as blind: and alienated from the life of God, the deep corruption, and the desperate wickedness of his heart, must alike prevent him from submitting to the righteousness of God for justification to life, deceived by an imaginary power of human ability to walk and to please God. From all such, the great lines of incarnate Deity, his atonement and grace, cannot but be hidden, and must be rejected as superfluous.

The opinions of Arius were too congenial with the pride of human wisdom not to find multitudes of defenders. Disputes enlarged the number among the wise and philosophic; who, eager to distinguish their acuteness, by definitions, and by attempts to make that clear and consistent with a supposed reason, which must be incomprehensible, because above it, spread the Arian heresy, for which the platonic philosophy had prepared, and deluged the Christian world with this fatal error.

Expelled from the Church, by Peter, bishop of Alexandria; but restored by his successor Achillas, Arius so well strengthened his party, that Alexander, the successor of Achillas in that see; timid, candid, or cautious, hardly dared call the matter into discussion; till the spread of these heretical

opinions, compelled him to summon a council at Alexandria, where Arius was excommunicated with many of his adherents. But the wisdom of man reluctantly bows down to the revelation of God; and all the philosophic school of rational Christianity espoused the cause of the Heresiarch, and widened the breach, with the bitterness and contention natural to those, who having lost the power of godliness, were struggling for superiority; and, indeed, in many instances, it must be owned, the reputed orthodox were as far from the line of Christian truth and conduct, as their Arian opposers.

An. 325. It was thought worthy the great Constantine himself to preside in the decision of this controversy at Nicomedia. All attempts of the Emperor to heal the breach had been abortive, and applications to Alexander and Arius, by Hosius the good bishop of Corduba, were alike ineffectual. The general assembly therefore, of episcopacy, met in all the pomp of magnificence, with the Emperor at their head; and after disputes the most violent; mutual accusations the most abusive; and all the weapons of controversial sophistry exhausted; the Arian heresy was condemned; the creed drawn up by Hosius of Corduba, since called the Nicene, adopted; and banishment enacted against all who should refuse to subscribe the decree.

I shall not enter into particulars, by no means creditable to councils; nor enquire into the proper

mode of maintaining orthodoxy: yet I cannot but express my wish, that meekness and forbearance had prevailed over anathemas; for, as to the suppression of heresy by these, experience has fully taught how impotent is the effort.

ARIUS was deposed, excommunicated, and forbidden to enter Alexandria. His party, to save their bishoprics, were all, except two, engaged to subscribe to what they did not believe; and the breach, instead of being healed, was made wider than ever in the disputes and contentions disseminated by this means over all the Christian world. The change of a single letter *omoiousios* for *omoousios*,* left the vanquished party a loop-hole to creep out. So every one who subscribed retained his own sense: the constant effect of all forcible subscriptions, where any thing is to be lost, or any thing to be got.

The Nicene canons give us a very mean opinion of so many grave fathers wisely disputing, when Easter should be kept—whether a clergyman might imitate Origen's example and literal sense of Scripture regarding eunuchs—whether they ought to cohabit with their wives—whether a bishop can quit his church for a richer—how long the lapsed should be suspended;—and the like important subjects.

A worldly church, and an outward uniformity, being the object pursued by Constantine, it is no

* "*Like* essence, for *same* essence," alluding to the doctrine of the Trinity.

marvel, that a person acting on no settled principle should veer about. After the death of his mother Helena, his sister Constantia gaining great influence over him, Arius and his party, whom she befriended, had their condemnation reversed: and though the Nicene creed continued unrepealed, Athanasius, who had succeeded Alexander at Alexandria, and the orthodox trinitarians, found the courtly party, with the emperor at their back, strong enough to counteract all that had been decided, and to turn the tables of persecution on the orthodox. These resolutely persisted in refusing to receive to their communion the men, who affecting to subscribe the articles established, continued utterly to reject the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity. AN. 326.

It would lead me too far to recount the stand made by Athanasius; and all the wiles and court interest to ruin his reputation, and silence his opposition; but in vain. They could expel him from his see, but he returned triumphant to the charge, the unshaken champion, for many years, of what is yet held as the scriptural doctrine of the Trinity by the orthodox.

The gross frauds, and impositions attempted, and often with success, against Athanasius shew the shockingly debased state of the Christian hierarchy, to which, under the Emperor, all these accusations were referred. The deposition of Athanasius at the Synod of Tyre, was the triumph of Arianism. Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia, who

Mr. Milner says, "stuck at no fraud, and was ashamed of no villiany," had the Emperor's ear, and Athanasius was banished into Germany. An. 335.

The activity of Arius, who now returned in triumph to Alexandria, embroiled Egypt in the most furious contentions; and fear of consequences probably compelled the Emperor to summons him to court; where the same spirit produced the same effects; and Constantinople became the scene of the most unchristian contests. Alexander the Bishop, refused to receive Arius into communion, though, in compliance with the Emperor's order, he had subscribed the Nicene creed; and confirmed it by an oath, under an evasion, if Sozomen is to be credited, the most shocking. Certain it is he was not believed by the orthodox. It is said, that Alexander, bishop of Constantinople, ordered by the Emperor to receive him to the Lord's table, with fasting and prayer invoked God, either that he might himself die before the day appointed, *if Arius was in the right*; or that he would cut off Arius, and save him from what he counted such a disgrace as communicating with him. On the very day of decision, Arius died in a very extraordinary manner.

How difficultly can I believe a word of this? What! A man of Alexander's spirit, said to be *the nearest to primitive Christianity*, spend a night in fasting and prayer, to know from God *if Arius was in the right?* What an idea to beg his own death in that case! What authority warrants such

a wish? To pray for the death of Arius, if mistaken? What sort of primitive Christianity must this man's be? For his credit, and the honor of orthodox truth, I demur to the report.

That the death of Arius, in such a case, and after such a night of fasting and prayer, must appear suspicious, is no wonder: and I must believe, if the matter be rightly represented, it would injure, much more than serve, the cause of orthodoxy. It gives us on both sides an awful spectacle of the kind of spirit which prevailed in the Emperor, his courtiers, the orthodox patriarch, and the heresiarch Arius. The Church of Christ has small pretensions to spirituality amidst such combatants. I confess, I know not where to give credit. Deeds are done on both sides so contrary to every principle of love and the spirit of meekness and truth, that I stand like a man in court, between two witnesses, swearing to contradictions.

Never did a more fatal heresy than Arianism desolate the Church of Christ, more extensive in its spread, and more abiding in its continuance; and it is frequent to this day. But though I believe man cannot be saved in a fundamental error respecting the divinity of our Lord, that he should be persecuted or punished for his opinions, has no Scripture precedent, since miracles at least, and immediate intimations from God, have ceased. Exclude from the society of the faithful, those who refuse to worship the same true God: this is scriptural. But let no bitterness, nor wrath,

nor anger, nor malice, dishonor the discipline; much less any injury to the person, fame, or circumstances of the heretical, gratify human passions. The judgment of the Church is monitory, there is one who will pronounce the final sentence.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHURCH, ITS GOVERNMENT, RULERS, RITES, AND CEREMONIES.

THE Church, now in the esteem of some, was exalted to the highest pinnacle of prosperity, invested with vast authority: and the episcopal order collected in synods, and councils, with almost sovereign dominion. The churches vied in magnificence with palaces; and the robes and pomp of service, imitating imperial splendor, eclipsed paganism itself, with mitres, tiaras, tapers, crosiers, and processions. If outward appearances could form a *glorious* Church, here she could present herself: but these meretricious ornaments concealed beneath them, all the spirit of the world; pride, luxury, covetousness, contention, malignity, and every evil word and work. Heresy and schism abounded, and wickedness of every kind, like a flood, deluged the Christian world: whilst the heads of the Church more engaged in controversy, and a thousand times more jealous about securing and increasing their own wealth and pre-eminence, than presenting examples of humility, patience, deadness to the world, and heavenly mindedness, were, like gladiators, armed in all their councils, and affected imperial power and pomp in the greater dioceses.

By degrees the people became degraded into annihilation ; their voice neither asked, nor their consent deemed any longer necessary ; even the presbyters bowed to sovereign episcopal sway, and ministerial court appointments. The prelatical government became modelled after the imperial, into great prefectures : of which, Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople, claimed superiority ; whilst a sort of feudality was established, descending from patriarchs, to metropolitans, archbishops, bishops, some with greater, and others with less extensive spheres of dominion. Thus each was seen grasping at more than belonged to them ; contentious to enlarge their own respective privileges and immunities ; yet, cordially conspiring to erect the most despotic pretensions of episcopal authority over all the Christian world beside, and assuming to themselves all church powers, as they claimed all its emoluments ; and to become lords of the inheritance, instead of examples to the flock.

Among these the *Bishop of Rome* held a most distinguished place. Constantinople, however, began to eclipse the ancient seat of empire ; and her bishop to claim a *supremacy*, always disputed, and terminating at last in the schism of the Greek and Latin Churches. General opinion seems to have been in favour of the ancient capital. The splendor of her bishop ; his sumptuous manner of living, riches, revenues, pomp of worship ; and a multitude of clerical offices, attracted especial notice. Hence the elevation to that see became a principal object of sacerdotal ambition ; and occasioned

contests and tumults as dreadful to the public peace, as contrary to every idea of Christian charity and humility. Yet, though claiming some privileges above his fellows, the Bishop of Rome had as yet pretended to no direct dominion over his brethren, who were supposed to hold by the same divine right as himself; and though often appealed to, as umpires in disputes, the Roman prelates were not at all exalted into authoritative rule over their fellows. This abuse, like all others, grew up by degrees; and chiefly by a succession of crafty, ambitious, and intriguing pontiffs, embracing, in a system of uniform policy, every occason to aggrandize themselves, and exalt the power of their see. This they successfully practised, till, as we shall see, they trampled at last upon the prostrate world. It is grievous to recount the history of a Church, called Christian, where all the prominent features speak nothing but pride, ambition, and abominations of its most distinguished rulers. A gracious man knows how to separate the precious from the vile, and can discern amidst all abuses a glorious Church, not having spot or blemish, or any such thing; not indeed in these disgraces to the Christian name, but in the hidden, secret, faithful few; who entered into none of these depths of Satan: lived in humility, zeal, heavenly mindedness and fidelity; loved the Lord Jesus Christ out of a pure heart, fervently; and walked in all the ordinances of the Lord, blameless.

As theoretical opinions, drawn from the Platonic school, afforded such a noble field for Polemic

skill, in all the various explanations, definitions, and learned efforts to convey precise ideas, in subjects incomprehensible, and above the grasp of the human intellect; so had the same philosophy introduced the preposterous notion of a purificatory process to pass on departed spirits—the transcendent excellence of abstractedness of mind—the honor of solitude and celibacy; as less exposing to demoniacal impressions and possessions—and the charms and spells to avert their influence and malignity. The martyrs had also risen into wonderful and criminal veneration. Their relics, tombs, were supposed to possess singular sanctity, and to afford protection from these wicked spirits. A desire to render Christianity more palatable, led to the adoption of the ceremonies of paganism, only altering their objects; and putting saints and martyrs in the room of the deities that were exploded. Thus, as we have seen in the decrees of Gregory Thaumaturgus, the festivals of these confessors indulged the Gentile converts in all the sports, amusements, and bacchanalian enjoyments, which had been the great delight of the heathen temples. Visitation of the tombs led to distant pilgrimages, where men more famous had lived and died; especially to Jerusalem, where Christ and his Apostles had resided, and chiefly expired. And as the difficulties and the distance increased the meritoriousness of the act, these kind of penances became fashionable, and highly spoken of. The very dust from the tombs was brought home as precious; and a tooth or a bone, esteemed an invaluable acquisition. With such fooleries could

the Christian world be amused, deceived, and enslaved; laid open to all the juggles of an interested priesthood, and a veneration inculcated for things and persons, that produced an accumulated load of superstitions, ceremonies, and observances, superseding the whole of evangelical and vital religion. All the artifices of heathen priests were coarsely imitated by their Christian successors. Prodigies, miracles, visions, conflicts with the devil were pretended, to give sanctity to places and persons, in order to multiply objects of devotion; encourage pilgrimages; increase a veneration for the office, and to fill the pockets of the clergy. Such was the general body of the church in these last Golden days of Constantine.

CHAPTER V.

OF THE TRUE CHURCH.

IN the midst of all these conflicts, disputes, and follies, Christianity extended its pale in the East, and to the North. Persia was full of professing Christians, persecuted by Sapor, and supported by Constantine, who obtained peace for them. But the outward diffusion of the knowledge of Christianity must be ever distinguished from the possession of the truth in the love of it, and the gift of the Holy Ghost to those, who are chosen from the beginning to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. These, as they will always be the few, the poor, the despised, the foolish things of this world, stand forward with no prominence of human observation, and therefore afford no particular grounds for notice, from those by whom the records of history have been handed down to us. They were too simple to enter into all the learned disputes and definitions, and were content to worship God the Son, as the excellent before them had done, as the true God; and to acknowledge a triune Jehovah without attempting to comprehend the mode of his existence; satisfied with the heart-felt knowledge and experience of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost.

Though probably not altogether free from a tincture of the prevailing superstitions, attention to the revealed word preserved them in the exercise of faith which worketh by love, and still ready to die for their Lord if duty called. Nor do I doubt, but among the bishops themselves, there were blessed men, of true faith and primitive manners, such as Hosius of Corduba, and Paphnutius, and many others in the established Church, as well as among the Novatian, Donatist and Melesian prelates. Men uninfected with courtly ambition and worldly objects, and seeking in simplicity the sheep of Christ scattered through this present evil world; a holy seed according to the election of grace. In these I consider the true Church as subsisting; the living members of Christ's mystical body; baptised into Christ, and having put on Christ. Exactly as at present, they are separate and distinct from their fellows whilst dwelling among them, and though outwardly sharing in the same worship and ordinances, men essentially of a different spirit, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. Such the philosopher Ammianus describes them in a thread-bare coat, and contrasts them with the pride, pomp, and pageantry of their brethren.

SECTION VI.

FROM CONSTANTIUS TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIFORMITY BY THEODOSIUS.

PART II.

CENTURY IV. TO THE END.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUCCESSORS OF CONSTANTINE TO THEODOSIUS.

THE seat of empire having been now removed to Constantinople, the rising glories of the new metropolis began to eclipse the splendor, diminish the influence, and dispute the superiority of the ancient capital. The residence of the Emperor, and the presence of the Constantinopolitan patriarch at his court, gave him a weight and dignity, which threatened to overwhelm his competitor at Rome, and to secure to him imperial prelatical supremacy. Yet this was held under the Emperor; who now, in all causes as well ecclesiastical as civil, exercised undisputed do-

minion; and he clothed with the weight of his authority the councils, which by his edicts were assembled. In these the bishop of Rome as yet, had established neither right of presidence or control.

An. 337—340. On the death of Constantine, his three sons divided the empire. Constantine the II. had Britain, Gaul and Spain: Constans, Illyricum, Africa and Italy; while Constantius possessed the East with the new metropolis, the seat of his father's erection. Ambitious discord between the two first, soon ended in the death of the elder, and the annexing his dominions to those of Constans. Nor did Constans himself long enjoy the fruits of his fratricide, being slain by the sword of Magnentius, who aspired to empire, and contended with Constantius for universal dominion. But, failing in the contest, in rage and despair he laid violent hands on himself, and left the world again subject to the son, as it had been to the father.

An. 350. Constantius seems to have embraced his father's religion; brought up probably under the same tuition, and feeling the fatal influence of the two Arian Eusebiuses, and his sister Constantia. The court was Arian; and therefore this became the fashionable religion. The party now uppermost failed not to improve the opportunity of oppressing the orthodox, urging the perverted Emperor to acts of violence against the patrons of the Nicene creed; who were resolute in rejecting communion with Arius and his espousers. Council

upon council, and synod upon synod were held: such having become the important cares of empire. In these assemblies, the Arians, supported by the Emperor, usually were superior, and caused the most vigorous of their opponents to be brow-beaten, oppressed and deposed by the abused power of imperial authority. The old and orthodox patriarch of Constantinople, recommended a successor, who was chosen by the people and presbyters to fill the see; but being known to be in the opposition to the Arian and courtly party, Constantius by his own authority ordered his deposition, and placed Eusebius of Nicomedia, the zealous friend of Arius, in the see, assuming the appointment of all the superior officers in the Church.

It was impossible, but these proceedings should excite the most violent sensations in the Christian world, and rouse all the zeal of polemics in defence of the true and established doctrine. The deity of God our Saviour was not an article of faith, that would admit of compromise. Many thought in that day, as we do, that all the salvation of sinners depended on the faith in this essential truth; and therefore contended for it zealously, I acknowledge, often too violently, and to the dishonor of the cause which they espoused. Yet, on the other side, the Arian weapons of warfare appear still more carnal in ambiguity, deceit, intrigue, mean courting of the great, and the strong arm of vengeance on their adversaries, from which last charge also the orthodox when in power, cannot be exculpated. The truth as it is in Jesus, receives no more impeach-

ment from the unchristian conduct of its professors, than from the bitterness of its opposers. The sun is not contaminated by the dunghill on which it shines.

A protest of an hundred bishops assembled under the famed Athenasius, against the deposition of Paul, and the election of Eusebius, produced only the Emperor's wrath, another synod, and his own deposition. To accomplish this an armed force was necessary, the influence of Athanasius in Alexandria and Egypt being so great. After a violent struggle, and many acts of cruelty, Athanasius, justly apprehensive for his life, fled to Rome; as yet the uncorrupted seat of orthodoxy.

I revere and honor Athanasius, but I hear his representations of his enemies with the suspicion, that a knowledge of my own heart compels me to exercise. That great violences might be committed by the new patriarch Gregory, and his imperial supporter the prefect of Egypt, Philagrius, I will not dispute: but that no provocations were given, no tumults made, no abuse uttered, or contempt shown to established authority, I dare neither say nor suppose. I rather imagine both sides were wrong, though I believe not equally so.

Under the wing of Julius, Bishop of Rome, and the protection of Constans, Emperor of the West, whose throne Magnentius had not yet overturned, and who professed adherence to the Nicene creed, Athanasius rested for a while in exile, and justified

himself in a council held at Rome, from the accusations of all his enemies.

An. 347. The two Emperors now agreed on a general council at Sardica, but instead of healing the divisions, the same asperity, the same animosity widened the breach, and the combatants parted more irreconcileable than ever. Indeed it is hardly possible it should be otherwise. The matter in dispute was incapable of compromise. Athanasius however obtained a vindication and acquittal from all the charges laid against him. A few trifling canons mark the spirit of the times. The forbidding the translation of bishops—their journeys to court—or abiding in another bishop's diocese to supplant them—and enjoining residence in their own. I smile at the resemblance of ancient and modern episcopacy.

The Eastern Church seems generally infected with Arianism, and supported that cause with vigour, and excommunications of the orthodox; who were little behind them in anathemas. Meantime the affections of the Alexandrians to their exiled patriarch compelled Constantius to invite his return on the vacancy of the see, by the death of Gregory. Athanasius met Constantius in his way at Antioch, and was graciously received. Eustathius, who had been deposed from that see, had there formed a congregation of those who adhered to him, and the Nicene faith. Flavian had succeeded him in his meeting-house. He first made use of the celebrated doxology, afterwards

generally adopted by the orthodox. With him Athanasius united; attended his conventicle, and joined with him in communion, refusing all Christian-fellowship with Leontius, the Bishop of Antioch, as a reputed Arian. When bishops forsake the confession of the true faith, and presume the Church must be with its dignities and emoluments, we must forsake them and not be the dupes of names. The true Church is only with those who own, worship, and love the triune God. Thus did Athanasius. The patriarch of Alexandria, the ornament of his day, preferred the conventicle of Flavian, to the cathedral of Leontius. Let the bigots to church-walls remember this. An. 349.

Pressed by the emperor to leave the Arians in possession of a Church at Alexandria, he consented, on condition that a similar indulgence were granted to the Eustathians at Antioch; another beautiful manifestation of his candor and disposition to the Christian system of mutual toleration. Athanasius was firm in the truth, and could not yield a tittle in point of doctrine, but he was no such bigot as he is represented, or uncharitable. The truths of God will not bear accommodation to a fancied candor or charitableness of judgment. I may possess the kindest spirit, and practice the fullest exercise of toleration and forbearance, and yet decisively declare that except a man believe the Catholic faith he cannot be saved. In my view, the damnatory clauses of the creed, which bears his name, breathe the noblest exercise of true Christian charity.

The return of Athanasius to his Church, was a day of triumph to the orthodox: though I am ashamed to record the manner in which some expressed their joy, by devoting themselves to a monastic life; an evil that now began to spread with rapid strides, and was countenanced by those who little apprehended the abuses which would grow out of it.

An. 351—355. The power of Constantius becoming universal by his sole possession of the empire, his Arian advisers renewed their efforts with success to humble their enemies, and to spread their tenets unopposed, under imperial patronage. Paul of Constantinople, first banished, and then strangled, is said to have made way for the succession of Macedonius, with much violence and bloodshed. And Athanasius, the great butt of Arian enmity, as its most formidable antagonist, did not sit long on his seat undisturbed. The Arian party, with the Emperor at its head, summoned a council at Milan, where, though all the menaces of the Emperor, and the clamours of his bishops could not procure the revocation of the Nicene, and the subscription to his Arian creed, the condemnation of Athanasius, with some opposition, was consented to, and subscribed by the council with very few exceptions. On these dissenters, the enraged Emperor, instigated by his Arian seducers, particularly the eunuch Eusebius, resolved to wreak his vengeance. Lucifer of Cagliari, Eusebius of Vercellæ, Dionysius of Cappadocia, were banished: Maximus of Naples was

tortured, and died in exile; and Liberius of Rome, for his faithful boldness, banished into Thrace. Hosius, the reverend and aged bishop of Corduba, who had been a confessor under Dioclesian, and for many years the zealous defender of the truth by his labours and pen, as he was the ornament of it by a holy conversation, remained an object of hatred. He disdained to temporise, and wrote a faithful testimony for the truth and Athanasius to the Emperor; warning him of the great day of account: for which act of fidelity, he was confined at Sirmium a whole year, notwithstanding his great age and infirmities. On pain of banishment every bishop must condemn Athanasius, and communicate with Arians. This order, the zealous heretics, its executioners, Ursatius and Valens, took care to enforce in the most rigid manner; and filled the place of the exiled with abettors of the Arian cause. So that the Christian world now trembled before the sword of heresy, as fearfully as it had done before the malice of paganism.

Athanasius, though supported by his brethren of Alexandria, was compelled to yield to the storm; and it was providential for him he had not been murdered, when seized in the church, during the celebration of the divine service, he was with difficulty conveyed away to a place of safety by the zeal of his clergy. The Monks of the desert concealed him, whilst the unworthy George of Cappadocia intruded into his see, and like another Laud, remorseless, persecuted all who differed from him, and drove the best of men from their churches. An. 356.

Sufferings united the faithful; and, what the spirit of charity and love ought long since to have done, persecution effected. The orthodox of Constantinople and the Novatians now cordially joined in communion, and were exposed to the same enmity by the Arians, for the one truth which they embraced. Agelius, the Novatian bishop, was expelled from his church, as well as Paul the catholic patriarch; and rather than communicate with Arians, resolved to submit to every suffering. Nor could they be moved by the demolition of their churches, pulled down by the Emperor's order. The stones may be removed, but the truth of the divinity of God our Saviour defies all the impotent efforts of its enemies.

An. 357. Liberius, tired of exile, at last weakly, as wickedly subscribed the Arian creed, and the condemnation of Athanasius. Infallibility was not yet claimed by the Roman pontiff: besides, the bishopric of Rome was *a very good thing*, and people must not be too scrupulous. Let no bishop hastily condemn him. Even old Hosius of Corduba subscribed at last, in order to obtain his liberty, a creed ambiguous indeed; but the condemnation of Athanasius could not be extorted from him.

Council upon council, at Rimini and Ravenna, now confirmed the courtly religion. Arian subscriptions, generally adopted, shewed the infamous worldly-mindedness, and the hypocrisy of the prelatical tribe of that day. When a bishopric,

and the true and proper deity of the Son of God, were put in competition, we can hardly doubt which will carry it in the heart and choice of every worldling.

Athanasius, from his desert concealment, issued forth his defences of himself, and of his doctrine; to the former many objections may be taken; to the latter none can be justly formed, by those who hold the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity. I mention one beautiful paragraph only, it is concise and conclusive. "The Father cannot be the Son, "nor the Son the Father; and the Holy Ghost is "never called by the name of the Son, but is "called the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. "The holy Trinity is but one divine nature, and "one God, with which nothing created can be "joined. This is sufficient for the faithful; hu-"man knowledge goes no farther. The cherubims "veil the rest with their wings."

An. 361. In the midst of these contentions the Emperor closed his life of tumult and councils, having just deposed Miletius, and conferred the see of Antioch on Euzoius, the pillar of the Arian heresy; from whose hands, shortly before his death, he received baptism; deluded with the wretched idea then commonly entertained, that thereby all sins were cancelled, and a ready passport gained to Heaven. Such opinions, and such bishops must give us the most humiliating idea of the degraded state of the Christian Church, in every thing which constitutes the vitals of Christianity.

JULIAN, his successor, had escaped the massacre of his relations. Constantius, on his accession to empire, had murdered the two brothers of the late Emperor, Constantius Dalmatius, and Julius Constantius, with their children, who had been put in possession of Thrace, Macedon and Achaia, which he seized. Two infant sons of Julius Canstantius alone were spared, too young to excite the apprehensions of the jealous and bloody Emperor. These he educated privately among the clergy, and they were made readers in the church. By the death of Gallus, Julian remained the only surviving branch of the imperial family of Constantine. He had been sent to command in Gaul, and was engaged in a dangerous, but successful warfare against the Germans, those ever dreaded enemies of the Roman empire. On a decisive victory, his army by acelamation saluted him with the title of Augustus, in opposition to all his earnest and reiterated remonstrances against accepting this high and dangerous eminence. The jealousy and rage of Constantius instantly awoke. He was on his march to punish this presumption, when arrested by death, he expired at Mopsucrene in Cilicia, and left the vacant throne to his living rival.

JULIAN, branded by historians as *the apostate*, hardly deserved that name: nor possessed much less of true Christianity than his uncle or cousin, whom in the exemplariness of his moral conduct, he seems to have greatly exceeded.

The Christianity he had been taught scarcely merited the title. He beheld with horror his cousin's hands defiled with the blood of his nearest relations; he saw all the religion of the court, consisting in the ambition and intrigues of sycophant bishops: and he was too far removed from the poor and lowly Christians, to have ever discovered the evidence of its divine power; whilst he was tired out, and disgusted with the bitter quarrels and contentions about abstruse opinions, which those who were most violent probably least understood. His philosophic friends whom he caressed, used all their arts to deceive and influence him; strengthened his objections, and turned his hatred for the ill-usage of his family by professing Christians, against Christianity itself; the truths of which he had never truly known or embraced, and therefore the profession of it he easily renounced. From his earliest youth initiated in classic literature, his proficiency was considerable, as his labours were indefatigable. He produced several literary works, in which he displayed much vanity of science, but few traits of a deep and matured understanding. Seduced by the flatteries of the pagan sophists, he became the dupe of the most abject superstitions; and he betrayed as gross an ignorance of true philosophy as of religion, by his implicit belief, as well as by his diligent study of all the absurdities of magic. His writings afford a strange mixture of genius and folly, of wit and weakness, of candor and duplicity. Yet his virtues deserve an honorable mention. He was as brave in the field, as diligent in the study; most

exemplarily temperate and sober; disdaining the indulgences of the animal man, and eager to acquire the title of philosopher: and what above all deserves a tribute of praise, in all his enmity and opposition to Christianity, he indulged nothing of that cruelty which had so often marked his pagan predecessors. With sovereign power he maintained universal toleration. He favoured, indeed, the superstitions which he himself practised; but he compelled no man, by any pains and penalties to conform to them. He condescended, as an author, fairly to enter the lists with argument and ridicule, as more potent adversaries had done before; and if accused of attempting to undermine the Church, encouraging sectaries and schismatics; and shutting up the schools of philosophy from the Christians: I see nothing in all this, inconsistent with the character of a perfectly honest, but mistaken man; and only admire, that with the force of the empire at his beck, he should refrain from using weapons too congenial with the fallen spirit. His tolerant indulgence of all sectaries is but the duty of every governor, whatever his religion be; and the policy of it as well as justice, deserves to be imitated. He did not much harm to true Christianity, by shutting up the philosophic schools; whilst he left to every man the free perusal of the word of God: and how he undermined Christianity, more than every rational philosophic Christian has done since, I see not. I admire his candor, his lenity, his tolerance: I pity his misfortune in being exposed to such advisers, and being destitute of understanding as of grace, in

adopting such senseless superstitions. Christians have abused him with an asperity, and infidels vaunted his excellencies with an exaggeration, of which he was equally undeserving.

His favour to the Jews, in permitting them to rebuild their desolate temple, seems perfectly consistent with the general toleration he had granted; and might or might not be designed with particular enmity to the Christian faith; whether this was interrupted by balls of fire, or the death of the Emperor, seems not to weigh a hair in the scale of Christianity. I confess myself more inclined to accede to the representation of Basnage, than of Warburton; and fear greatly, that if Julian was not quite as good a Christian as the bishop, he was probably a better man; fully persuaded, had their situations been reversed, the bishop would have preferred persecution to tolerance.

AN. 363. His death, however, put a period to all his purposes. After a short reign of twenty months, he fell in the flower of his age, in an expedition against the Persian monarch, by the lance of a common soldier. So that from him Christianity could have received no material injury; and I am persuaded, however malignant his intentions might be, the *true* Church enjoyed under him, all that real Christians need desire, tolerance and peace.

An. 363. Jovian, during his short reign, approved himself a cordial friend to the Church of Christ; and, though blamed for his political conduct, appears an eminent instance of true wisdom and piety; maintaining general toleration even to pagans, whilst he promoted the faith which he himself embraced with his countenance and support, without violence or persecution of those who differed from him. Under him, Athanasius, drawn from his concealment, returned to govern till the Emperor's death, the church of Alexandria, and to enjoy a short-lived gleam of prosperity, which he had seldom known.

An. 364. Valentinian and Valens, succeeding to the empire, though brothers, took different lines of conduct. Valentinian protected, like Jovian, the orthodox; whilst Valens, deeply rooted in the Arian heresy, renewed in the East, his portion of empire, the persecution against the Nicene abettors; expelled them from the seat of prelacy, and placed the churches under the care of those of his own faith. The Novatians shared in this banishment with the Catholic Church: their bishop's eminent piety and excellence, stands on record; and when, through favour, they were indulged with restoration to their places of worship, they kindly embraced in communion, and affectionately treated their persecuted brethren of the general Church. How much more noble a spirit does this exhibit, than all the narrow bitterness of bigotry?

AN. 371. Athanasius suffered another banishment through Arian malice; but was again recalled to his see, notwithstanding all the intrigues of his enemies, and permitted there to die in peace; the brightest ornament among the eminent of his day. That he was not exempt from many things highly blameable, is certain; yet, if we dare not palliate his faults, candor forbids severe reprehension, and wishes to impute them rather to the times than to the man.

VALENS, like his predecessors, held councils; and if we judge by the canons, deplorable must have been the state of the Christian world. The metropolitans were to appoint bishops and the presbyters, "which," Mr. Milner says, "the "apostles had done, who doubtless ordained pas-"tors in all the churches *by their own authority*." I have diligently examined the Scriptures, and very much doubt whether the apostles ever exercised any such absolute authority. When a church was collected by them in any place, the congregation, I apprehend, always chose and approved the elders and bishops who were set over them, and these the apostles ordained; and no appointment of pastors over a church ever appears, by the apostles, without their concurrence. But these episcopal encroachments corresponded with the dissolute manners against which other canons are levelled, with angel-worship—and magic—and enchantment, strange practices for christian presbyters.

AN. 378, 379. VALENS perished in battle. His successors, Gratian and Honorius, concurred in their endeavours to suppress paganism, and erect the banners of the cross; but none used methods so strong and severe as Theodosius, who has received the name of *great* from those whom he favoured; though, I confess, I find nothing in the man or his manners deserving such a title. His temper was violent, and his government tyrannical. In order to suppress paganism, he made it a capital crime to sacrifice or attend any of its rites. Resolved to establish *uniformity* of religion and worship throughout the empire, he enacted the cruelest pains and penalties against those who refused to conform to *his establishment*. He is highly commended by the great luminaries of that day, Ambrose and others, for his zeal: and it must be owned, that he gave as humbling a lesson of submission to their insolence and superstitions, as he himself exercised imperial violence and oppression against all who dared to dissent from them. Libanius, the friend of Julian, and still attached to heathenism, presumed to address the Emperor, and teach him lessons of Christianity and moderation. "That religion ought to be planted in men's minds by reason, not by force." To which maxim, however contrarily the heathen philosophers had acted, the truth of it was not the less, and Christian governors ought to consider its justice: but abused power and superstition, under the dominion of prelatical arrogance, will always be justified; and persecution in them be clothed with the pious guise of salutary coercion. I openly de-

sire to testify my abhorrence of all such conduct: fully persuaded that nothing can be more opposite to the spirit and temper of the Gospel: and so far from being subservient to its real interest, must tend in the highest manner to debase Christianity, and to promote hypocrisy and false religion. The truth needs no such auxiliaries. I am sorry to differ wonderfully from St. Ambrose and Mr. Milner, in the character of Theodosius, as very doubtful, in my view, of real Christianity. I can behold an overbearing Emperor—passionately resolved to bow the necks of his subjects to *his* religious opinions—a fierce bigot—establishing uniformity by the most unchristian edicts: and, except his zeal for orthodoxy, I see in him no traits of eminent piety, or vital godliness.—BUT—he was an Emperor!

CHAPTER II.

THE PREVAILING SCHISMS AND HERESIES.

THE good bishop of Caliari, Lucifer, by ordaining Paulinus at Antioch, in opposition to the Arian Euzoius, incurred censure; and even his fellow sufferer, Eusebius of Vercellæ, broke off communication from him. If any man ask wherein this schism consisted, I confess I am at a loss to tell; but I presume the sacred immunities of the see of Antioch must have been supposed to suffer some infringement hereby. That good men, exiled, ready to become martyrs, can for these trifles quarrel, and excommunicate each other, is a humbling proof of human weakness, and of the difficulty of suppressing the spirit of bigotry even in the best; so strongly do our educational prejudices cleave to us.

The Novatians still maintained their ground, and every testimony is borne to their remarkable purity of doctrine, and piety of conduct, their zealous suffering for the truth, and cordial affection to the good men of the suffering Church who differed from them: *But*—they were schismatics.

The *Meletians* continued nearly in the same predicament as the Novatians; whilst the Donatists are accused of great violences and acts of atrocity.

I think there ought to be a distinction made between some of the furious of that sect, called Circumcelliones, irritated probably by acts of oppression, and the general body of Donatist bishops and presbyters, among whom the spirit of Christian truth and purity was by no means extinct.

The Priscilianists, a new sect in Spain, fell under suspicion; and accused by the bishop Ithacius, afforded a precedent for punishing heresy with death, of which we have since had too many examples. An. 384.

The Manichæans subsisted in vigor, and their fanciful opinions found many abettors; even Augustin, afterwards so famous, joined himself to them. But the great heresy was Arianism, from its highest pitch of what is called Semi-arianism, to the lowest degradation of admitted Deity, in any sense: about which, indeed, the disputes have been many, and endless distinctions upon distinctions framed, as if there could be any thing between self-existent and created; and that any shades of secondary deity could degrade or exalt the person, denied to be *the true God*. For nearly forty years Arianism was the prevalent religion, especially in the East: and except Athanasius and a very few resolute witnesses for the truth, whom no menaces could terrify, or death induce to temporize, all the bishops of any name in the Christian world, at Rome, Antioch, Constantinople and Alexandria, subscribed the Arian creed; submitted to the Emperor; and kept their bishoprics. What the body of the people must be under such teachers, it is

not difficult to suppose; and when, added to the unsoundness in the faith, the reign of superstitions, destructive of all true religion, is considered: the days were arrived, when the great Head of the Church, should he come, would hardly find faith on the earth. For even the orthodox managed their disputes in a manner so anti-christian, that victory thus obtained was no triumph; and with regard to all the trumpery of superstition and monkery, they were as deeply involved in these, or more so, even than their rivals. The Monks and Solitaries were all Nicene creed-men; and indeed, to escape persecution, and to maintain in peace and quiet their opinions, was probably one of the first causes of their flight into the deserts. They were always espoused and patronized by Athanasius, and zealous to preserve him in his banishments. Their establishment under the fanatic Anthony was regulated by rule; different communities were formed; and thence spread their baneful influence over the Christian world. He died AN. 357.

The Platonic philosophy so highly revered, having established the maxim, "of the necessity "of abstractedness of spirit from body, in order, "to come into communion with God," every bodily mortification became prescribed, to attain this desirable end. The famous Dionysius gained incredible numbers of proselytes, by his instructions how to raise the soul, by contemplation, to the highest perfection of its nature, in absorption

in God. In order to this, celibacy, virginity, fasting, poverty, nakedness, self-inflicted punishments, and solitude, became recommended as the first of attainments, and essential to eradicate every thing human from the heart. The great St. Anthony figures highly in this line; and his life, by Athanasius, is as mortifying a proof of the spirit of the biographer, as of the hero of the tale; and an afflicting evidence of the piety, then had in highest estimation. I turn from it in disgust, and am amazed that a man of Mr. Milner's spirit can affect to gloss it over with lines of palliation, if not of approbation. The pride and self-righteousness of the human heart ought not so to be treated, to exalt such a character. Even Athanasius can report miracles the most absurd, ridiculous and contemptible; whilst Anthony pretends to live without food, and to enjoy such visions of God, and conflicts with demons, as excite at once our horror and risibility; but he had one virtue paramount—He and his Cænobites were the determined foes to Arianism, and friends to Athanasius.

From these, all the vagabond orders of friars and nuns, black, white and grey, have since sprung. But, even la Trappe, is distanced in austerities by Anthony and his associates. Monastic piety grew into the highest reputation; and as ambition of clerical honors was not among the things excluded from monasteries, their presumed sanctity afforded a rich supply for the prelatical

corps, from these enthusiastic ascetics. Vices and scandalous practices cannot but creep in, even amidst every outward restraint; they have been proved to exist in a fearful manner among these abstracted beings. But I must give the first monks credit for the purity of their conduct; and suppose the generality of them honestly exercised all the mortifications which they believed so meritorious, however some feebler brother might be seduced by temptation.

It would be loss of time to recount the other eminent men in this way. *Ex uno disce omnes.* I think St. Anthony the best of them. Paul Martyn, of Tours, and all the herd of these ornaments of monkery, afford an unvarying tissue of pious frauds, false miracles, debasing superstition, and the most insolent pride. It must be a dark church indeed that can challenge these for its luminaries.

But maxims of the most destructive nature had now become sanctioned by the first authority, and practised by orthodox and heretics alike. "That "fraud is pious, when employed to promote the "interests of the Church;" and, that "Errors in "religion called for the sword of the magistrate." Thus craft and cruelty became established as by law. The consequences we have seen; and shall with anguish have occasion to renew our indignation.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE PRINCIPAL PERSONAGES.

ATHANASIUS.

Elected Bishop	An. 326
Died	373

AMONG the first characters of the age, the Bishop of Alexandria is to be justly reckoned. The stedfastness of his faith, and the purity of his life, his vast influence in the affairs of the Church, and the happy success of his labours, have been already in part considered. The creed which bears his name, and conveys his sentiments, will remain to the latest posterity among the noblest human monuments of the confession of the true faith, once delivered to the saints. His abilities, learning, zeal, fortitude, his enemies will not deny him. Some sweet traits of his charity, humility, and superiority to all bigoted church attachments, mark a man of a singularly excellent spirit. His credulity, attachment to the monks, and some want of Christian meekness towards his persecutors, his friends will not vindicate. The torrent of superstition bore him down, and his temper was not always proof against provocation. But take him for all in all, he seems the brightest ornament of

that high station to which he had been advanced. I shall look for greater Christians in a humbler life, no where for a more able defender of the cause of God and truth.

EUSEBIUS OF CÆSARIA.

Elected . . .	AN. 313
Died	340

This famed prelate, remarkable for his knowledge, reading, and ecclesiastical investigations, stands eminent among the first authorities for church history. But if I remain of the same opinion, that I was at the beginning, it is because every thing I have seen and read, confirms me in his partiality, credulity, and unfair representations, wherever the interests of the party which he espoused were concerned. The learned translator of Mosheim, endeavours to vindicate him from the charge of Arianism, though he admits it proved, that Eusebius maintained a certain disparity and subordination, between the persons of the godhead. I have before observed, the contemptibility of these evasions, and the insignificance of all the shades, where true essential deity is denied to God our Saviour.

Eusebius was a great favorite at court. No good sign for a bishop, under two such monarchs as Constantine and Constantius. And to his influence and instructions much is to be attributed, in all the subsequent struggles between Arianism and Orthodoxy. Whether he thought in all things as Arius, or not, it is certain he supported him

and his adherents. He, with his namesake of Nicomedia, were the pillars of the Arian heresy.

AMBROSE, OF MILAN.

Elected . . .	374
Died	390

That it was an age of childish credulity, Mr. Milner admits, but he seems less disposed to perceive the evil effects resulting from the prelatical claims, which Ambrose was disposed to use in their largest extent. His reluctant appointment to the church of Milan; the very improper steps he took to be excused, and his extorted compliance, are known; unfit for the office, as he acknowledges, he began to seek his qualifications in the diligent study of Origen; a worse instructor he could not have chosen. His zeal however against Arianism shone forth conspicuously, and the stand he made against the Emperor, and his mother Justina, are proofs of it, not always perhaps according to knowledge. Sincere, charitable, devout; in conduct exemplary, and in the labours of his office diligent; yet had he drank deep into the spirit of the times. His sister, a zealous devotee for virginity, drew forth from him the most immoderate encomiums of that state: and his treatises on the subject, puerile indeed, and jejune, much promoted the delusion, to the great grief of many parents. The piety of superstition is awfully equivocal. How high the spirit of true godliness was in the church of Milan, I must learn from something besides their church music, and the Ambrosian chant.

It gives me no favourable idea of the pastor, or people, to find him unable to consecrate a church for want of *relics*. But, lo! at the difficult moment, a vision! more than was wanted, is discovered, even two bodies of martyrs! The wondrous miracles wrought on this occasion; a blind man restored to sight, devils cast out; the happy dedication of the Church, and the compleat triumph of Orthodoxy over Arianism, are recorded! What indeed could resist the prelate, who produced *men possessed of devils* to testify before the relics of St. Protasius and St. Gervasius, the truth of the Nicene creed? If St. Ambrose was not more successful in his sermons, and urged some better arguments than these, it would seem of little importance whether the Milanese were Arians or Trinitarians. His funeral oration over such a man as the Emperor *Valentinian*, needs only to be read to stamp the the courtly prelate with hypocrisy, or the rhetorical declaimer with contempt. His discipline respecting Theodosius, is a glaring proof of prelatical insolence over abject superstition; and all done for the honor of the Church. So submissive an Emperor could not but secure the encomiums of the Milanese disciplinarian.

The life of this bishop extant, prefixed to his works, Mr. Milner supposes not genuine, because, "stuffed with fables." I am afraid this is the strongest evidence of its truth: such being the very spirit of the times. That he was liberal, devoted to his office, assiduous in the observance of all church duties, is a praise he truly merits. His

works are various, but alas! they display no excellencies of a peculiar nature. His divinity is wretched, and often unscriptural; and his moral treatises insignificant. His interpretations were formed on the model of his master Origen, and as absurdly allegorical. Of the doctrines of predestination and grace, he appears to have very false conceptions. He was strongly disposed to venerate relics; and to entertain superstitious expectations from the intercession of the dead. And no man was more an advocate for monastic institutions, and the divinity of his episcopal office. I repeat a remark I have made before, that all the fathers I have ever consulted are but miserable guides to evangelical truth. There is more clearness of gospel doctrine, more genuine purity of truth, and more beautiful application of it to the conscience, in one modern sermon, than is to be found in a folio of Ambrose.

Yet with all his defects and follies, Ambrose is a character comparatively respectable, and eminent in the days in which he lived, among his fellows. Few such laborious bishops then cultivated the Lord's vineyard.

Many other worthies would but afford a repetition of nearly the same observations. The light of truth and grace was grown very dim; and the power of it, as all allow, was reduced very low: but the Church was exalted very high, full of magnificence, riches and honors; honors and riches too much coveted, and exciting the most scandalous, and often bloody contentions between ambitious rivals for preferment.

Among the numerous authors who wrote on Christian subjects, the following hold a chief place, Macarius, Victorinus, Pacianus, Optatus, the Apollinarii, Ephraim, Hilary, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Chrysostom, Jerom, Augustin. Their characters will be found detailed in Mr. Milner's Church History; and passages extracted from their voluminous works with exemplary patience; some of them breathing the spirit of truth, piety and grace. But whoever will be at pains to consult these vast folios themselves, will be disappointed at finding them stuffed with a farrago of superstition, errors, monkery, Origenism, Platonism, bitterness, and bigotry, that will little repay the pains of perusal. Some indeed are less exceptionable than others; Chrysostom and Austin are among the best. But, I hope I shall be forgiven by the venerators of antiquity, if I prefer the moderns, on every subject which exercised the pens of these ancient sages, as far superior in force of argument, precision of doctrine, and in clearness of Evangelical truth, and its influence. Compare the testament of Ephraim, with any modern theological treatise of reputation, or Austin with Edwards. The vaunted Basil, as well as others, is drenched in all the dregs of ascetics, false miracles and monkery, infecting the world with the most pernicious institutions, blazoned as the perfection of Christian excellence.

The father of Gregory resided at Nazianzum, where was only one pastor or bishop, and one flock. Gregory's friend, the *great Basil*, offered

him the bishopric of Sasima, a place mean and obscure, for hitherto many little villages had their bishop. The pride of Gregory was offended, and a quarrel succeeded.

AN. 368 to 389. Leaving Nazianzum for Constantinople, Gregory at first preached to a few Christians in a conventicle, the Arians possessing all the churches. An orthodox presbyter, it seems, did not then think himself degraded by so doing. Growing highly popular by his preaching, he was advanced to the episcopal order. He was a man famed for eloquence, and it is especially recorded of him, that his discourses were animated "*with* "*warm and pathetic addresses to departed saints:*" such is the divinity to be expected from these eminences. Indeed all the fathers, as far as I have gone, have left on my mind the fullest conviction, that they were the farthest from infallible guides, or decisive authority. Were errors, such as are to be found in them, detected in any modern authors, they would wonderfully destroy their reputation, and reduce them to a very low degree of excellence. Even Ignatius, if his fourth epistle be genuine, "supposes the man who fasts on the "Lord's day, or any other Saturday but Easter "Eve, *a murderer of Christ.*" And, in correspondence with this idea, the Council of Constantinople decrees, that "if a clergyman commit this crime, "he be deposed; and if a layman, excommunica-"ted." Clemens Alexandrinus affirms, that "the "heathens were justified before Christ came, by

"philosophy—that Christ actually saved many "out of hell by his preaching there—and that "the torments of hell are not eternal but purifica- "tory." Origen, Tertullian, and many others, stand branded with heresy. Even the soundest, such as Ambrose, Jerom, Chrysostom, all vindicate the practice of evil that good may come, and the lawfulness of pious frauds: nay, impiously affirm, that both Peter and Paul inculcated and practised them. Indeed they severally stand convicted of a want of truth, that the meanest Christian at present would blush to have laid to his charge, and confounded to have proved upon him. Mr. Milner strangely apologizes, as if "in these "dark ages, with their dim light, these humble "souls groped their way to the heavenly king- "dom." Had they not the same bible as ourselves, and same divine interpreter? Why then dark, ignorant, and superstitious? And for the proof of their *humility*, those who read their writings will be grievously at a loss. In many things they no doubt are commendable; but as enlightened Christians, as deep divines, as masters in Israel, we find them strangely defective. It is not a little astonishing, that mere antiquity, like objects seen at a distance through the haze, should have clothed them with a veneration and magnitude, to which, if we judge by their writings, they were so little entitled. Can error, folly, fraud, lying miracles, superstition, monkery, receive any justification or apology from the spirit of the times? The bible is the bible, and truth is truth, nor can they admit of any unhallowed

departure from them. We may and ought to pity the mistakes of good men; and may safely admit much excellence compatible with much ignorance and infirmity. But such are not the oracles we may follow, or the examples we must imitate. Candor indeed requires that every man be allowed to explain his own sentiments, and not to be made an offender for a word; we may not pervert an expression to a meaning he would disown, or draw conclusions for him, which he would disallow; but no candor will call ignorance, wisdom—error, excusable—superstition, devotion—self-righteousness, the gospel—or such forced, wretched, and often false as well as feeble interpretations of the Scripture, sound divinity.

An. 395. Augustin figures among the most eminent of the fathers, as an author; but a considerable portion of his writings will be found, jejune, declamatory, and sometimes highly objectionable; and in the very point of the doctrines of grace, wherein he excels, there is more deep reasoning, solid argument, precision of language, and scriptural evidence, in one page of Edwards on Free Will, than in all the voluminous works of Augustin put together. His conduct respecting the Donatists will never find a parallel in the Scriptures. His arguments against them shall be allowed all their real weight; but they are greatly weakened by calling in the sword of the civil magistrate, and the harsh syllogisms of fines and imprisonment. Surely such are not the weapons of our warfare. Yet is Augustin an eminent character; his princi-

ples evangelical, and the general tenor of his life highly exemplary. His little diocese of Hippo eminently profited by his labours ; and in a day of great decay, exhibited specimens of primitive Christianity. But I am passing my prescribed bounds of brevity.

CHAPTER IV.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT AND CEREMONIES.

THE Church, in all the pomp of rites and ceremonies, groaned under the load of her own trappings. Vestments, holidays, fasts, festivals, shrines, martyr's tombs, holy water, with all the trumpery so happily since improved, had begun to deck out the meretricious Church of Rome. The growing virtue of relics, and the supposed efficacy of the intercession of departed saints, opened a door for the grossest superstitions. Even Augustin himself laments, that the yoke, under which the Jews were held, was liberty compared with the bondage imposed in Christians.

Now also was first introduced that most unscriptural mode of *patronage*, since become so prevalent. To encourage the building of churches, and obtain the merit of this good work, the builder was permitted to appoint his own presbyter. Wealth and riches had acquired the first importance, and the congregation of the faithful was become nothing in the scale.

The government of the Church was quite new modelled. Instead of the people chusing their own bishops and presbyters, they were no more consulted. The presbyters wholly depended on

bishops and patrons: The bishops were the creatures of patriarchs and metropolitans; or, if the see was important, appointed by the Emperor. So Church and State formed the first inauspicious alliance, and the corruption which had been plentifully sown before, now ripened by court intrigues for political bishops of imperial appointment, or at the suggestion of the prime minister.

Not that there were wanting men who had sense to discern, and courage to remonstrate against the growing abuses. Such was *Jovinian*, who denied the superior sanctity of monachism and celibacy, and bodily macerations, affirming that a Christian who lived in marriage, and a life of temperance and piety, was equally acceptable to God. But he was soon silenced by the Bishop of Rome, and by the famed Ambrose, in a Milanese council, and banished at their instigation to the isle of Boa.

Ærius, a presbyter, made a fiercer resistance, and maintained more offensive doctrines; that bishops and presbyters in the Scripture were the same persons, and only different descriptions of age and office—that prayers for the dead were futile, and hope from their intercession, vain—that stated fasts and festivals had no prescription in the New Testament. These, with similar assertions, roused a host of enemies, and he was quickly silenced. So superstition stalked triumphant, and no man dared open his mouth against any abuses. Indeed, the Monkish institutes, and self-inflicted austerities, were regarded as the perfection of

human excellence, as the highest form of Christian attainment, the very life and soul of religion.

Ardœus, a man of tried godliness, could not keep silence; and freely censured the depraved manners of the clergy, for which he was excommunicated. He formed a little society of men like-minded, over which he presided as their bishop; but this the intolerance of the time would not suffer, and he was driven with his adherents into banishment, continuing there to hold fast the faithful word. Grievous charges were laid against him: his uncharitable judgments of the clergy—his celebrating Easter at the time the Jews kept the passover—and his worshipping the Deity under a human form. The intolerant Church began to be armed against all who refused implicit submission to prelatical domination.

CHAPTER V.

THE SPIRITUAL CHURCH AT THE END OF THE FOURTH CENTURY.

WE have seen the outward visible Church rent with disputes, and sunk in pride, pomp, luxury and ignorance. Shall we look for the body of the faithful among these? If we do, we must expect to find them not wallowing in wealth, and decked with imperial splendor, but among the poor of the flock, too simple to enter into, or understand the deep metaphysical controversies, and too truly taught of God to follow blindly the current of prevailing superstitions. As the orthodox doctrine was still maintained in the churches, no doubt God's presence was not wholly withdrawn, notwithstanding the errors and follies which had crept in: amidst grievous departure from Evangelical simplicity, much truth and godliness remained. Many bishops were truly men of God, such as Augustin and others, with their little and obscure flocks, who, in their contracted spheres, seem to have cultivated the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and the life of religion among them. Of this we have a strong testimony borne by Ammianus the historian, a Heathen philosopher, and an enemy to Christianity. The greater bishoprics, as Rome, were seldom filled but after bitter con-

tentions, and often bloodshed. So Damasus ascended the Papal throne, fighting his opponent Ursinus. "At Rome," says Ammianus, "they "ride in chariots, splendidly arrayed, enriched "by the offerings of the ladies, attended by a "noble retinue; feasting luxuriously—their tables "surpassing those of kings: But how much more "rationally would they act according to their "profession, if they imitated the exemplary lives "of their poorer brethren, the bishops of the pro-"vinces, in the plainness of their diet and apparel, "the modesty of their looks, and the humility "of their demeanor, walking acceptably with the "eternal God as his true worshippers."

A pleasing fact thus opens to our view, that far from the theatre of ecclesiastical conflicts, and prelatical pride and parade, the courts of monarchs, and the thrones of cathedrals—in humble poverty, retired from scenes of luxury and ambition, a race of worthy pastors fed their flocks in the oblivion of the great; not less respected by the sheep for the thread-bare coat which covered them, nor held in less reverence for the modesty and meekness of their deportment; truly apostolical in their manners; not lording it over God's heritage, but examples of the flock. O that the great Head of the Church would restore this holy race of bishops to his desolate heritage!

Under such pastors the true Church still appeared, glorious in the eye of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, amidst the spots and blem-

ishes which disfigured it. Among the purer party, I reckon the Novatian bishops; and probably many also of the Meletians, Eustathians and Luciferians. Nor should I despair among the Donatists that men of like manners might be found, with whatever abuse they have been loaded. Far removed from the great sources of corruption, riches, power, and connection with the great and philosophic world, they gave themselves to the word of God and to prayer; their work was their wages, and their people their crown and joy of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Nor do I doubt but many of the solitaries of the desert, who had fled from persecution, carried with them at first, a real sweet savour of Christ, and felt happy to have escaped from a disordered world, to be more occupied in the work of prayer and praise: and when driven thither as a refuge, instead of drawn by fanatical superstition, many walked with God and went to glory.

I am enquiring after God's secret ones, the remnant whom the world knoweth not, the chosen, and called, and faithful; the only Church worth a Christian's care.

PERIOD SECOND.

CENTURY V.

FROM THE ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIFORMITY BY THEODOSIUS—TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE REFORMATION.

THE establishment of Christianity under Theodosius, and the uniformity enforced by his decrees, seemed to have placed the CATHOLIC CHURCH on the summit of eminence. This, added to all the wealth poured into it, and the patronage now enjoyed, cast a glare of splendor around it, which might lead an inattentive spectator to reverence this establishment as a glorious Church; but corruption already preyed on its vitals. The name prevailed, but the glory was departed. The profession of Christianity had become general, but the power of it was nearly lost. Ambition, pride, luxury, and all the legions of evils engendered by wealth and power, lodged in her bosom. Heresies, contentions, schisms, rent her garments and discovered her nakedness; whilst every hand grasping at pre-eminence, sought their own exaltation, instead of in honor preferring one another, and in meekness instructing those who opposed themselves: the victors as well as the vanquished, afforded an humiliating spectacle of the absence of all divine principle and influence.

The divided empire began to fall in pieces, and to be crushed by its own weight; whilst the feeble hands which grasped the trembling sceptre, scarcely defended the tottering throne on which they were seated. We are now sinking into Gothic barbarism, ecclesiastical usurpation, monkery triumphant, and the profession of Christianity buried under fraud, follies, ceremonies, and all kinds of the most ridiculous and debasing superstitions. I feel myself, like the adventurous traveller, entering the burning soil of Afric, surrounded with desolation, whirlwinds, moving pillars of sand, and wide spreading barrenness; and stretching his eager eyes over the waste, to catch a rising tree, or a verdant spot, which may afford a resting place for his weary feet, and a welcome fountain to cool his parched tongue.

CHAPTER I.

CALAMITIES AFFLICTING THE CHURCH.

THE vast empire of Rome was now divided into two parts, AN. 395—Arcadius reigned at Constantinople, and Honorius at Ravenna, who had preferred it to Rome for the capital of the West. Weak and feeble princes. Under the latter, AN. 400—the Goths began their ravages in the West, continuing their incursions till the final destruction of the empire. These were a swarm from the northern hive of barbarians, called by Selden, the Officina Gentium, under the various names of Goths, Ostrogoths, Vandals, Suevi, Alans, Franks, Burgundians. The desolations which these terrible invaders spread were inconceiveable. AN. 407. War of such a predatory kind, itself, must be abundantly dreadful; but from these, it was peculiarly destructive to all who professed the Catholic faith. The barbarous tribes were in general idolaters, ignorant, warlike—living only by the sword. Those among them (as was the case of many) who had imbibed any thing called Christianity, had chiefly received it from from the Arians, whom the severity of the Theodosian establishment had compelled to take refuge among the northern barbarians, and who had converted them to *their* Christianity. In consequence, the first irruptions of these savage conquerors were

marked with especial fury against the Catholic profession. The Pagans who remained in the several countries, seized the occasion to stimulate their heathen brethren to avenge their wrongs on the Christians; and wherever the Arian conquerors came, their persecutions of the Nicene believers retaliated severely all the evils which they had themselves suffered. Though I give not implicit credit to the report of Victor in Africa, yet the devastations there were great, and the massacres of the faithful inhuman. Gaul and Spain were deluged with these barbarians; and Genseric, passing into Africa, every where marked his way with blood. The bishops, who confessed the true divinity of Christ, were tortured, maimed, banished or massacred, and their churches levelled with the ground. AN. 429.

In the East, the Persian monarchs exercised similar severities, by whatever cause provoked, and threatened the extinction of the Christian name. Whilst even where the Roman dominion still subsisted, the bitterness and enmity between the Orthodox and Heretics, supplied the place of Pagan adversaries; and the contests for the greater bishoprics, at Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and other cities, exhibited the scandalous conflicts of men professing the peaceable religion of Christ, and murdering one another in support of the ambitious candidates, who disputed the several sees with envenomed rage, mutual excommunications, and torrents of blood. How deplorable the state of the Church must have been, amidst these rava-

ges without and within, is hardly to be conceived; whilst ignorance and superstition advanced with gigantic strides, as the truth and knowledge of the Scriptures were extinguishing.

The Pagan system, indeed, was nearly destroyed in the western empire, though some symptoms of it yet remained; and the impure rites of the Saturnalia and Lupercalia, continued to be celebrated; too congenial with human depraved appetite to be wholly abandoned: but fresh edicts restrained them, and in the East the younger Theodosius completed the conversion of Pagan temples to the worship of the true God, and purged his army and magistrature from every remnant of the Polytheists: a few sophists only remained to fan the expiring flame. But the East escaped not the ravages of northern barbarians. The Huns cruelly invaded and plundered Thrace and its confines; AN. 429. the Vandals, Africa; whilst the Goths poured as a deluge on the West. There, at last, after the sackage of Rome, returning to the charge, Italy fell, with its capital, into the hands of Odoacer; AN. 476, and hardly began to breathe under a settled government, before a new horde of Ostrogoths supplanted their fellows. AN. 493. Under Theodoric their leader, they conquered Odoacer, and after various battles, seized the disputed throne. The miseries of the Church during those conflicts were terrible; nor could such accessions as were made, be any compensations for the losses sustained. Even the conquerors, when they assumed the profession of Christianity, with whole

nations and armies baptised, at the instigation, and following the example of their monarchs, only changed one superstition for another, and seem as much heathens nearly as before. Such were the Franks under Clovis, persuaded by his wife to embrace her religion, and baptised by Remigius, bishop of Rheims, with all his court. The history of the sacred vial, but lately broken in France, is a proof of the ignorance on one side, and the knavery on the other; and forbids me to entertain any higher opinion of the Christianity of Remigius, than of his Catechumen Clovis. An. 496.

An. 449. The Saxons must not be forgotten—invited to assist the helpless Britons to expel their northern foes, they seized the kingdom which they were called to defend; inhumanly ravaged the country, destroyed the churches and monasteries, and drove the poor remains of the Christian inhabitants into the mountains of Wales and the peninsula of Cornwall.

Desolations spread on every side; but though the hail fell thus from Heaven, men repented not of their wickedness, and the Church grew more corrupt than ever, both in doctrine and practice.

I am tracing the Christian Church through the wilderness—there I see the carcasses of the rebels in abundance strewing the plain—and I am searching out the few Calebs and Joshuas, without whom she had been made as Sodoma, and been like unto Gomorrha.

I hardly need mention some attempts of the Jews, which, though mischievous, shewed only for a little while, their impotent malice against the Christian name.

CHAPTER II.

INTERNAL DISSENTIONS AND HERESIES.

THE imperial establishment of uniformity, was far from procuring the peace of the Church, or if we may judge by experience, from advancing its spiritual prosperity. The Church indeed became vast in extent. The wings of the temple were stretched out wider and farther, and gold and precious stones, and gorgeous robes, decked the central sanctuary at Rome and Constantinople; but the divine inhabitant was fled.

AN. 411. The heresies before recorded still subsisted. The Manichæans continued to disperse their wild opinions, of the two original principles of good and evil. The Novatians, Meletians, Marcionites, and others, existed, though much reduced in numbers. But the Donatists, particularly in Africa, seem to have gained a strong interest; as they were able in a synod, where Augustin was victorious, to muster two hundred and seventy-nine bishops of that persuasion. A proof how small those African dioceses must have been, when more than six hundred prelates assembled on that occasion. The pen and preaching of Augustin, thinned their ranks; and I wish these had been the only weapons he had wielded. I must condemn, because I believe it both unscriptural, and

a sign of weakness in any dispute, where the secular arm is called in to inflict pains and penalties for opinions. Many returned to the Church from conviction ; more from terror of punishment ; and the others were cruelly treated, banished, or murdered. I see no shadow of such conduct allowed in the Gospel word. Vindicate this whoever will, my poor suffrage must be against such proceedings. They would have made me a Donatist rather than an Augustinian.

The Arians still subsisted, and spread their pernicious tenets, however held down by the strong arm of power, and hunted out by the orthodox under the Grecian Empire. Many were banished; but they carried with them opinions, held with greater tenacity, because of the sufferings which they had brought upon them ; and taught with greater zeal among the barbarians, where they had taken refuge. They had, under the northern ravagers, whose consciences they directed, a fair opportunity of avenging the injuries which they had suffered ; and they were too little Christians to neglect it. Their arm fell heavy upon the orthodox, whom they conquered, especially in Africa ; and they pleaded in their vindication, the example which had been set them by the Theodosian establishment. Banishment, expulsion, and plunder, were the penalties they inflicted, and often death itself. Augustin died during a siege, when these Vandal Christians attacked and subdued his diocese, and Africa. An. 430.

I may not here pass over a very disputed fact of Arian cruelty, and Catholic orthodoxy vindicated by a miracle; even the enabling those Christians, whose tongues were plucked out by the roots by the Vandal king, to recover and speak as plainly as ever in vindication of the deity of Christ. The historical testimonies of the fact are said to be respectable; but the spirit of the times I must confess, forbids me to be credulous. I demur to the witnesses; I suspect fallacy in the examination, or falshood in the fact. Pious frauds had found such vindicators in Ambrose, Jerom, and others, that it had become meritorious to exalt orthodoxy by any means. Nor can I think the Christian cause gained any real force or evidence against Arianism hereby. I fear the difference between the Arian and Catholic Christians in general, in all that constitutes real Christianity, was very little in that day, and except the point of doctrine itself, respecting the essential deity of Christ, superstition and all its degrading attendants among both, were pretty equally disseminated. The more I consult the book of God, and compare the Scripture miracles with these, the less reason I feel to admit such prodigies. The Athanasian creed needs them not, and no man ever was convinced of divine truth savingly by miracle.

An. 429. But new heresies, the spawn of idle wanderings of imagination, and eastern subtleties, sprung up, to exercise the zeal and disputes of the watchful polemics. Nestorius and Eutyches, two men of good reputation, started a fresh sub-

ject for investigation respecting *the nature* of Christ; and taking opposite sides formed two great parties in the Church.

The incarnate God the orthodox church confessed perfect God and perfect man; but the mode of the *hypostatical union* of the divine and human nature, had not been so expressly defined. Apollinaris had denied Christ a human soul, and supposed that the divine nature supplied its place. Nestorius, a Syrian, and his followers, to be at the greatest distance from such an idea, suggested that Christ consisted of *two persons*. He refused Mary the title which religious zeal had begun to give her, of *Theotokos*, the *Mother of God*, and allowed her to be only the *Mother of Christ*, *Christotokos*, to whose human nature alone the title should apply. Cyril of Alexandria, denounced his anathemas against this new sentiment, which were repelled by the like from Nestorius of Constantinople. The world was in a flame about a manner of expression, which probably, had candor and gentleness been used, would easily have been adjusted and peace restored, AN. 431. The council of Ephesus declared the true faith to be, "one divine person, in whom both natures completely subsisted without confusion." It does not appear that the Nestorians were a hair's breadth from admitting this definition, if controversy had not exasperated the spirits of all parties and prevented an amicable explication. Nestorius denied the consequences imputed to him, from refusing Mary the title of *Mother of God*, and I think with the

translator of Mosheim, that the term was neither Scriptural nor innocent. Notwithstanding the condemnation of Nestorius, his sentiments were greatly propagated in the East, where still a large body of Christians remain of that denomination.

An. 448—451. *Eutyches*, an abbot of Constantinople, adopted the opposite sentiment to Nestorius, and maintained that Christ had but "*one person* and *one nature*, *the incarnate Word.*" Hence he was accused of denying Christ's humanity, and as such excommunicated and deposed. A council assembled at Ephesus admitted his explication of his sentiments, and exculpated him from heresy. But in an appeal to Rome, which Leo, *the great* in insolence and prelatical ambition, summoned another council at Chalcedon, to examine, Eutyches was condemned, banished and degraded, with Dioscurus of Alexandria, Cyril's successor in the see, and the president of the Ephesian council. Eutyches was absent, and not permitted to plead his own cause. Such was the violence and injustice of these wretched assemblies. Leo's letter was adopted as conveying the sense of the Catholic church, of *two distinct natures* in *one person*, without change, mixture, or confusion. But the decisions of the Chalcedon council widened the breach it should have healed. The followers of Eutyches explained, and persisted in the *unity of the nature*, though they admitted it twofold and *compounded*. Acacius, patriarch of Constantinople, wishing to moderate and reconcile all parties, engaged the Emperor Zeno to publish a decree of union, in

order to heal the differences if possible, between all contending parties. But the Roman pontiff Felix, struggling for supremacy, seized this occasion to assemble a new council at Rome, and to confirm the statutes of Chalcedon, and excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople. Hence a fresh schism, and ground of quarrel arose. Some bishops siding with Rome, and others with Constantinople: and thus the division between the Greek and Latin churches was widened. AN 482.

It does not appear that Nestorius or Eutyches denied the godhead and glory of Christ, or the real atonement made by him on the cross; but it was the miserable temper of those times to be searching Plato and Aristotle for subtilties of explication, and as soon as a new idea was started, it was made the subject of solemn controversy. The bishops delighted in these wretched councils, where their polemic powers were to be displayed, and their influence increased: and thus where gentleness and a peaceable spirit might have healed, disputes and anathemas liberally hurled at each other, widened the breach into irreconcileable enmity, and drove many farther from the truth than they really meant to go; and made verbal controversies moral errors.

But there is one heresy yet to be taken notice of, which broached in that day, and fostered, has continued to spread its fatal influence, and may be reckoned among the most deadly weeds that have grown up in the garden of the Church, *pelagianism* in all its ramifications.

An. 411. This heresy derives its name from Pelagius, a Briton, who with Celestius, a Scot, first propagated it at Rome. And being driven by the Gothic invasion into Africa, carried their erroneous doctrines to Carthage, where they spread, and wakened up all the zeal and powers of Augustin to suppress them. The radical principles of this heresiarch went to the destruction of the fundamental doctrines of revealed religion, a *vicarious atonement* and *divine influence*. He denied the corruption of human nature, or any imputation of sin from the first man—affirmed that every person is born as pure as Adam, that sin is only the imitating of Adam's transgression—that nothing is necessary to human perfection but the exertion of our native faculties—that every man who does evil has it wholly in his own power to repent and amend—that the human will is as free to good as to evil, and requires no supernatural aid.—That an infant needs no remission of sins—and that our works are meritorious of salvation.

An. 417. Pelagius is admitted to be a man of irreproachable character; an able and subtle disputant. Attacked by the bishop of Hippo, he secured the favour of the patriarch of Jerusalem; justified himself at an assembly of bishops held in that city, and afterwards at Diospolis. And when at first the controversy was carried to Rome, Zosimus the Pope, pronounced in his favour, either seduced by the subtilties of Pelagius, or ignorant of the importance of the matter in dispute. Augustin, however, and his associates demurred to

the Roman decision; continued to challenge further enquiry; and at last prevailed upon the yet not infallible Bishop of Rome, to change his opinion, and condemn the heretic. This being accompanied with the acute pen of Augustin, and the bitterness of Jerom; and effectually seconded by the imperial penalties and punishments, suppressed for a while the spreading contagion. But a new modification of the doctrine under Cassian, a monk at Marseilles, AN. 431, revived and diffused more abundantly the pleasing poison, too congenial to the pride of human nature, not to find numerous advocates. Cassian softened down some of the most revolting sentiments against revelation, by admitting that though every man had power to *commence* repentance without divine preventing grace, merely by the calls of the word, no man could *persevere* without it. He denied, that in consequence of any predestination, divine grace was given to one more than another—affirmed that Christ died alike, and equally for all men—that the same grace necessary for salvation, purchased by him, was alike offered to all men—that a man without grace was capable of faith and holy desires—that every man was born in a state of perfect freedom of will, equally capable of resisting the influences of grace, as of complying with its suggestions.

This modification of Pelagius' doctrine, or semi-pelagianism, spread through all the western and eastern churches. It suited the spirit of proud

unhumbled man; and many who did not think it prudent to avow *all* the Pelagian sentiments, secretly favoured Cassian's opinions. The fatal effects have reached our own times. It is the religion of the unawakened conscience, and will not be vanquished by any weapons of earthly temper.

Augustin brought forth all his artillery, and nobly defended the doctrines of grace, in many a laboured treatise, which I may not enter upon, because others abundantly more powerful have been produced, than his or Prosper's, his best associate. Austin himself seems to have been mistaken in some very principal points. His notions of the effect of baptism are highly unscriptural. He every where puts *sanctification* in the place of *justification*: and he mingles with what is excellent, so many monkish follies and superstitions, that I must repeat my former suggestion, how much better helps we have for the discovery of Christian truth, than are to be found in the best of the fathers. Who, that hath read Luther on the Galatians, Calvin's Institutes, Edwards on Free-will, and a host of moderns, would prefer Austin, or Prosper? But I confess my astonishment at Mr. Milner's assertion, "that the doctrine of *particular redemption* was un-"known to the ancients, and he wishes it had re-"mained equally unknown to the moderns." I am shocked that the Scriptures of truth should be treated thus slightly: or the greatest and best of men to be laid under so unbecoming a censure. The grand point Augustin maintains, is *the necessity of divine grace in order to salvation*—that there is *an*

eternal purpose of God, or *predestination*, with regard to those who shall be saved—and that they and *only they*, will finally obtain it. These truths have from the beginning been charged with contradictions, and branded with severe uncharitableness, but an awakened conscience, a humbled spirit, and a divinely enlightened heart will not perceive them. I mean not to enter into the defence of these doctrines, whilst I profess my belief in them. I will leave it to experience to demonstrate, that they who are *particularly redeemed* will be the very persons who feel themselves bound by every tie of love and duty to glorify Christ in their bodies, and in their spirits which are his; and thus display a more enlarged measure of real holiness in temper and practice, than ever was or ever can be attained on any other principles, or by any other means than those which the spirit of God hath provided.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE CHURCH GOVERNMENT, RITES, CEREMONIES, AND DISTINGUISHED TEACHERS.

THE emperor was as yet acknowledged supreme. An. 451. He deposed and turned out the bishops, or put them in as he pleased; and his influence, when exerted, hitherto met little or no resistance in nominating to the important sees. Constantinople, the seat of his residence, was raised to peculiar dignity. The bishop of Rome grew jealous, and using all his wiles, contended for the supremacy. The East chiefly acknowledged the one, the West the other; but each missed no opportunity of enlarging their jurisdiction, and encroaching upon their rival, liberally dealing out their mutual anathemas. The Bishop of Jerusalem aspired after his ancient honors, and gained the patriarchate of the Palestines. The great patriarchs now assumed the sole right of consecrating bishops in their province; convened yearly synods; encouraged appeals to their courts of judicature; and received complaints against their prelates. But the Emperor as supreme, and general councils, interposed to check the patriarchal abuses. To extend their authority the patriarchs endeavoured to attach the monks; protected them against their bishops; excited disputes between the prelates,

and sought to draw all power to themselves; whilst each laboured to extend the bounds of their own jurisdiction at the expence of their neighbours. Rome especially received applications with avidity; and by a polite profession of being the protectress of the oppressed, drew appeals in abundance to her tribunal. By a well regulated system of craft and encroachment she continued to rise in the scale of eminence. To this scarce any bishop contributed more than the ambitious Leo, AN. 457. Nor did the vices of the clergy lessen the reverence paid to them by the ignorant and superstitious. The impudence of Martyn, bishop of Tours, is particular, who maintained at an imperial entertainment, that a presbyter was superior to an emperor. The false piety of miserable devotees had made the function of the clergy a very desirable thing; and introduced a horde of idle and vicious men into the church, among whom saints sprung up as mushrooms; and to these the stupid vulgar looked up as to the highly favoured of the Deity.

The monks, like clouds of locusts, covered the face of the earth; and regimented under diverse leaders, served to support the dignity of the Church, and to afford from their body, a most abundant supply for the vacant sees. Convents multiplied throughout the Christian world; vaunted by the spirit of the times, as among the most meritorious of deeds.

A multitude of authors, whose works still exist, though in dust, flourished; but highly renowned

as they were in their day, scarcely attracting notice in ours. Even Theodorit and Austin will hardly be ever consulted, as commentators upon Scripture. Nor do I know a single individual to whom now a reference would be made. So transcendently superior is modern criticism, in clearness of exposition, evangelical doctrine, and practical improvement. All the works of that age are clouded with puerilities and superstitions; which last plentifully increased. Departed spirits rose into veneration; their images began to be held sacred. A fancied immediate presence of the saint was supposed to be attached to some of them: and false miracles consecrated their deification. The merit of visiting the tombs of martyrs, and pilgrimages to other famed places, grew into a thousand abuses; and relics were esteemed a sovereign cure for diseases of body or mind; for driving away devils, and a charm against every human misery. The bishop of Rome among the first, encouraged this lucrative trade, and himself dispersed these wonderful favours to the deluded multitude. In aid of all the nostrums invented to quiet men's consciences in this life, the purgatorial fire, adopted from the heathen, came in aid to save them in the next; and as the clergy claimed the most ample power of regulating its severity, or terminating its duration, the deluded multitude were eager to procure their help to alleviate their expected sufferings, or to shorten the years of their torment.

Affecting the most sublime attainments of perfection, the *mystics*, before mentioned, drew the

gaping crowd to admire their self-inflicted austerities. Under pretence of exalting the spirit to higher communion with God, by fasting and macerations, and exposition to all the inclemencies of the sky, like the Jogis of the East, from whom probably this folly derived its origin, men stood on pillars, immoveable, for years together, and there expired. Among these Simeon Stylytes acquired peculiar glory, by raising his pillars from six to forty cubits high, and there exhibiting his wonderous sanctity to the admiration, and almost adoration, of the gazing multitude. Against these and the like abuses, so much in vogue, one man, named Vigilantius, a presbyter, is said to have remonstrated. His zeal against the rage for relics and the rising idolatry, provoked the irascible Jerom. This monkish patron of the prevailing superstitions, so violently assaulted the impertinent reformer, that he was glad to purchase his safety by his silence.

The ceremonies of the Church grew in proportion as the life of religion was lost. The clergy failed not to make themselves important; and the ignorance of the times, and the established superstitions, regarded *them* as only capable of approaching the Deity, and obtaining favourable responses from him. A pomp of worship, garments, utensils, altars, awed the vulgar into reverence; and a round of perpetual bawling services, night and day, kept up the semblance of fervent devotion. The Churches were loaded with finery, and the Nestorian controversy introduced Mary, with her Son, in the

first and most conspicuous place of the orthodox sanctuary. Solid silver encased and enshrined the rotten bones, bodies, and relics of the saints. The *public penance* was now cunningly dispensed with, and *private confession to a priest* substituted in its stead. And thus to receive absolution, was as convenient for the culprit, as it gave importance to the ghostly father.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TRUE SPIRITUAL CHURCH.

BUT where, amidst error, superstition, and prevailing ungodliness, is the true Church to be found? I answer, among a few who still held the head Christ, and continued to worship him in spirit and in truth: but I confess, on viewing the various parts of the Church, I hardly know where to fix for preference. All seem to have corrupted their ways. The greater ecclesiastics appear too ambitious and contentious for truth's lowly dwelling. I cannot look for real religion in a Leo, a Felix, or Dioscurus: nor can I hope to find it among the Pelagians, who deny the influences of divine grace, however specious their plea or appearance. The Arians furnish as violent and bitter a spirit, as they shew a radical error in doctrine. Shall I search the convents? Perhaps an individual may be found, a singular exception to the general rule. Shall I gaze upon the pillared saints, or the solitaries of the desert? They will afford nothing which can answer my criterion of pure religion. Yet I shall not doubt but the Lord had a people throughout the world. Augustin was evidently a bright and shining light among the men of that generation: in conduct exemplary, as sound in faith, and zealous for its purity. We

hear of four hundred and forty-six bishops assembled with him in Africa, then apparently the garden of the Church. These, many of them at least, may be supposed men of like minds with himself; and the small flocks, occupying their care and under their immediate superintendence, blessed by their labours. Their situation in life was probably such as Ammianus before described it, indigent, devout, simple, like the people to whom they ministered, and with whom much of the power of godliness yet rested. And, no doubt, in other parts of the empire, many resembling these were found, far from the greater sees, the constant objects of ambition and avarice, and distant from the councils of polemic bitterness and contention: men, who holding the faithful word, shunned unprofitable disputes, intent on the edification of their flocks, in the knowledge which is after godliness.

The labours of St. Patrick in Ireland, were said to be attended with such effects on that wild people, as to give hope that something better than nominal Christianity was produced. It must be acknowledged, however, that the legendary tales of these popish Apostles are to be heard with much hesitation, and the arch-bishoprics bestowed as their rewards, render their motives as suspected as their reports were exaggerated. Whether the metropolitan of Armagh was a real saint of God, is not a little problematical.

But not among the Catholics only would I seek the true Church: with the reputed heretics also,

I shall expect to find men of a right spirit, and truly devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, notwithstanding the hasty anathemas denounced against them. The Novatians were still a body subsisting under holy bishops. Nor can I doubt that the Nestorians, at least many of them, were partakers of the grace of God in truth, as their fervent zeal to spread the Gospel of Christ strongly demonstrated. Indeed, the very disputes themselves, however to be lamented and condemned, would excite some to more careful examination of the Scripture, to watchfulness and prayer: and whilst the disputants themselves confessed the incarnate God, and faith in his vicarious atonement, however they differed in the explication of inferior points of doctrine, we may hope their errors might not be fatal.

The grievous sufferings also of many, through the incursions of the barbarians, or the savageness of Arian persecutors, could not but greatly tend to awaken in their minds deeper views of eternal things, and drive the faithful to seek their rest in the great Shepherd of Israel, and in waiting for his salvation; whilst those who yielded their bodies to stripes, imprisonment and death itself, for the preservation of a good conscience, gave the most unequivocal evidence, that they acted under a divine principle, and knew in whom they had believed.

It must be admitted by those who know the word of God, and the nature of true Christianity, that amidst its most extensive spread, among *the*

many called, there never were but *few chosen*: not to advert to the growing superstitions, and the wretched mode of baptising whole nations; even where the best teachers, and the greatest truth remained, the multitudes were only *in* the Church, but not *of* the Church, united by an outward profession indeed, but never joined to the Lord in one spirit. The state of things at that time nearly resembled the present. The greater dignitaries of the Church too much men of this world; the inferior clergy under their influence, and chusing the ministry for its advantages, or an idle life; and the people like their priests, easily engaged in the pageantry of rites, ceremonies, and superstitious observances; though a generation was preserved, who cleaved to the Lord, in one faith and served him out of a pure heart fervently.

The doctrines of truth, with the same creeds which we subscribe, were the avowed faith of the orthodox, whatever unhallowed superstitions were added to the ritual, and however prevalent the Arian heresy might be, and the equally deadly, though more plausible doctrines of Pelagianism. These last, indeed, sapped the vitals of Christianity. Instead of a sinner lying at the foot of the Cross, to seek pardon and peace through atoning blood, the pride of self sufficiency, and the vain conceit of attaining personal perfection by innate human ability, rendered the sacrifice of Christ useless, and the Spirit of God, and all his operations unnecessary. Whoever is capable of saving himself, will not need nor desire to be indebted to another: But a generation remained according to the elec-

tion of grace, such as Augustin describes, who had not so learned Christ, but lived in humble dependance on his atonement, and expected to receive, and were actually blessed with experimental influence from the Spirit of all grace, which God our father in Christ, ever promised to give to those who ask him. I can esteem none in any age, as worthy the name of Christians, but those who being baptised into Christ, have received the Spirit of Christ, and put on Christ. Such I discover in that day, chosen, and called, and faithful; *few* indeed and of small reputation: but does any *real Christian*, in any age or place, expect to find more?

CENTURY VI.

CHAPTER I.

THE GENERAL STATE OF THE OUTWARD CHURCH.

WE are descending into the regions of darkness, and the shadow of death; where scarce a ray of truth casts its feeble glimmerings to light the benighted traveller on his way to the celestial city. The progress of barbarism advanced rapidly. Goths and Vandals reigned. The emperors of the East, Anastasius and Justin, exerted ineffectual efforts to stop their ravages. The very struggles to resist the invaders, increased the miseries of mankind. A momentary triumph of Justinian, by Belisarius in Africa, AN. 534, and Narses in Italy, AN. 553, was succeeded by fresh swarms of Lombards, AN. 568, who fixed their empire over the degenerate Romans, and ruled them with a rod of iron. Yet the conquerors themselves, by degrees melted down into the same mass with the vanquished, adopted their religion, and exchanged the ritual of Heathenism for Christianity; from which its features were now scarcely to be distinguished. Wonderous and wretched conversions of whole nations, Germans, Gauls, Britons, increased the fame of the monkish apostles, who ministered baptism to them by thousands; where a queen was

gained, and a complaisant monarch yielded to her solicitations, and ordered the conversion of his subjects. Left in all their former savageness of manners, licentiousness, and ignorance, the repetition of a formula taught them, and the sign of the cross, admitted them with facility within the Church's pale : except the change of names, little perceptible difference appeared between the Christian converts and the Pagan ; for, to facilitate the means of their conversion, the great Gregory of Rome, had expressly granted authority, as we have seen, to enjoy the same indulgencies at the tombs and shrines of martyrs and confessors, as had been usual in the temples of their former deities, with all the sports and pastimes attendant on these festivities : only the images of the Virgin and her Son, of apostles and saints, were worshipped instead of Thor and Friga.

Miracles multiplied under such apostles and such an auditory ; and produced as rapid conversions, as admiration, nay, almost adoration, of the sacerdotal order, who were invested with this high privilege. It would be hardly needful to enter into the detection of the frauds to which Papists themselves are now ashamed to give credit ; or the falsehood of miracles wrought by men, little scrupulous about the means of deceit, provided they advanced, what they called the interests of Christianity, and their own importance ; and got endowments for churches and monasteries. Mosheim infers the fraud of these prodigies, because they produced no real obedience to the doctrines and

laws of the Gospel; which indeed real miracles could have no more done than pretended ones. Converts of this kind could add very little to the Church, any more than the Jews, compelled to confess Christ by the power of Justinian, or baptised under the sword of Childeric. In these zealous exertions, Gaul and Spain stand peculiarly eminent. But all the power of monarchs, and all the wiles of false apostles, hardly replenished the ravages made by the Saxons in Britain, the Lombards in Italy, and the Huns in Thrace and Greece. In Persia the desolations were still more dreadful under Chosroes, and reduced the profession of Christianity very low. So that the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, by Augustin, and his monks, of the Irish by Columbus, of the Alans, Lazi, Bohemians, and some savage hordes near the Euxine sea, added comparatively but little to the nominal fold, which had been wasted by war and the sword.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE INTERNAL STATE OF THE NOMINAL CHURCH.

HERE all is as dark and gloomy within, as without inauspicious. Ignorance and superstition advanced with rapid strides, as the ravages spread on every side. And the greatest saints, even Pope Gregory, contributed to it, as much as the most stupid barbarians. His abhorrence of all pagan literature induced him to proscribe the noblest works of heathen antiquity, and to devote the writings of Livy, and other admired authors of ancient Rome, to the flames. AN. 590.

The monks, now cloistered and separated from the rest of the world, preserved the little literature which remained in the western world. But covered with the thick darkness of bigotry and superstition, their labours are supposed to have done much more harm than good. As all truth and godliness were supposed to be drawn from the writings of the fathers, and all excellence to be comprised in the legendary lives of saints and martyrs, on them their first cares were exercised; and in the great want of paper and parchment, many of the most precious and valuable remains of antiquity are said to have

been erased, in order to give place to these paragons of piety and compilations. Indignation rises on reviewing these miserable compositions of conventual folly. And whilst we regret that men should be thus uselessly employed, we sigh for the destructions they have made, now forever irreparable.

An. 552—559. Scarcely an author of that age (shall I except Boethius and Cassidorus?) affords a treatise that we shall ever peruse for edification. Their commentaries on Scripture are wretched, either consisting of quotations ill-tacked together of the fathers and ancient doctors, called *catenæ* chains—or the still highly esteemed allegorical interpretations, where all is visionary; perverted by the most absurd imaginations of fanciful superstition, or buried in hidden meanings and mysteries, which the more removed from the plain and common sense of mankind, appeared the more wonderful and profound. Whilst these were held up as the mirrors of *doctrine*; the models of *practice* were blazoned in the lives of the saints; and such saints! decked out in all the frippery of monkish fooleries and self-instituted services of voluntary humiliation and atrocious mortifications of the body; presented for the wonder, worship, and imitation of the ignorant; and daubed all over with the lying miracles which fraud invented, and credulity admired.

With such tuition and such examples, real religion must have needs sunk to a very low ebb: yet astonishing to tell, all these pretended to teach and

lead to the summit of human perfection : and a thousand rules were prescribed for the more or less perfect, in order to elevate men to saintship and beatification ; the miserable delusions of pride and self-righteousness ; and tending to the utter subversion of the simplicity which is in Christ. The Scriptures were forgotten, the one invariable guide to a holy conversation ; whilst all these self-instituted forms and follies were supposed to advance the christian to a higher region of sanctity than the bible ever taught.

An. 543. Among these multiplying orders of fanatic superstition, the Benedictines now arose, and grew into singular eminence under Benedict their founder. The professed object of their institute was to promote a spirit of superior piety : but that which engaged the patronage of Rome was the servile submission inculcated to her authority. These spread with amazing rapidity in the Western world, attracted the reverence and spoils of deluded devotees : and soon wallowed in wealth and profligacy, like their monastic brethren who had preceded them.

Whilst the monks and visionaries were thus active on the one hand, the pagan philosophers, not yet extinct, on the other, attempted to put a new face on the old religion ; and borrowing some of the features of Christianity, broached new and more plausible systems of heathenism ; which amidst the great decay of true Christianity still found many abettors. Among these, Chalcidius was the most

eminent, and so artfully wove together his philosophic, pagan and christian opinions, as to make it dubious to which of these he professionally belonged: though the decision is of little importance. He might take his choice, and be still the same man.

An. 582. But the Church, however fallen in wisdom and purity, had made pretty considerable advances in pride and contention, at least the heads of religion, who arrogated that name to themselves; and liberally dealt out anathemas against all who presumed to doubt their decisions or dispute their pre-eminence. The title of *œcumenical*, conferred on John the Faster, Bishop of Constantinople, roused the jealousy and mortified the pride of the Roman Pontiff, more anxious about these vain distinctions, than the life of godliness. The christian world was in a flame respecting two worthless beings probably, who had power and artifice enough to influence all their prelatical partisans to espouse their quarrels, with the bitterness and bigotry that personal disputes and zeal for superiority naturally gender. Constantinople claimed equality with Rome universally, and supremacy over the East; but Gregory and Pelagius as zealously asserted their superiority: and affected in right of their see, at least to be *primi inter pares*, on account of the eminence of their founders, Peter and Paul, with other arguments equally curious and conclusive. The eastern Church generally cleaved to Constantinople, the western to Rome: but whenever a prelate thought himself oppressed, he was sure to find a protector at Rome, whither his appeal was invited.

And he failed not, as courtly parasites who seek favour, usually do, to extol that jurisdiction as derived from heaven, and that bishop as God's vicegerent, which decided in his favor. But such jurisdiction was despised at Constantinople : and even the Gothic barbarian monarchs still exercised their supremacy at Rome, and suffered none to fill the see but with their approbation ; summoned councils by their authority, and judged the clergy at their tribunals. Nor had that encroaching see as yet dared to dispute the imperial dominion : but however reluctantly, submitted to an authority it was unable to resist. The fulminations afterwards so dreaded, had not hitherto been presumed to be hurled at Kings and Emperors.

The corrupt lives of the clergy bore a growing proportion to the wealth accumulated, the honors claimed by them, and the veneration paid to them. The imperial edicts and ecclesiastical canons preserve a record shameful to peruse of the prevailing abuses which called for such restraints. The bishops of Rome stand branded out of their own mouths by the mutual criminations of the contending candidates for the holy see, with every thing detestable. At the close of the last century, Symmachus and Laurentius, by assassinations, massacres, and perpetual tumults, strove for the sacred tiara. Three councils assembled at Rome, were as unequal to quiet the disturbances as to determine the truth of the immoral and flagitious accusations alike forcibly urged by both parties against their antagonists, and probably equally true. However the papal

chair was consigned by Theodoric to Symmachus, without any evidence of his having justified himself from the charges laid against him. Indeed impunity added to their presumption; the greatest crimes of the clergy seldom exposed them to the slightest correction. *Omnia Romæ venalia*, all things at Rome are on sale, was as true of Rome papal, as pagan. Belisarius sold the see to Silverius, for two hundred pounds of gold, and delivered Vigilius to his competitor, who soon made away with his rival.

An. 536. With such wickedness in high places, what could be expected of their immediate dependants? Yet they contrived to maintain their dominion over the superstitious and ignorant people. Nor did any thing in their conduct prevent the multitude from lavishing their treasure to procure absolution, which these *good* men alone could grant, and the participation of the merits of departed saints and martyrs, which was only to be secured through their mediation and instrumentality.

The merit of monkery, and of all who contributed to this unnatural seclusion, filled the world with convents, and the outward church with its most zealous defendants. This great army sought in one uniform cause their own privileges and those of the church to which they belonged.

Superstition now exalted to the throne, the power of religion was lost in the form, and the spirit of devotion in endless rites and ceremonies; which giving importance to the machinists, and in-

creasing the horde of clergy, filled also their pockets with riches: for however greatly the *merit of good works* was vaunted to the people, the priests must be paid for their services. No penny, no mass. The *canon of the mass* now produced by the great Gregory, with all its pomp and fooleries, became more universally celebrated. Images of saints, and relics multiplied so immensely, that there were sometimes more bones of a saint than ever belonged to a human body; and afterwards more pieces of the true cross then would have made a tree big enough for the two malefactors also. Purgatory kept up its lucrative trade. The merit any man wanted might be purchased by building churches and monasteries; or maintaining communities of idle monks, fanatic or profligate; or by interesting the dead on their behalf and buying a little of the superabundance of their merits. These the Church appropriating to herself, with the relics, ransacked even the oil of the lamps that burned at the tombs of the martyrs, and with great ceremony the Bishop of Rome disposed of this rich commodity at no inconsiderable price: and sent it as the greatest present even to crowned heads. And no wonder, it being invested with celestial energy, to chase away the dæmons and evil spirits, and to heal alike the diseases of body and mind. Yet these high favors were not always granted. An application from the Empress Constantina being made to St. Gregory, to obtain some relics of St. Peter or Paul, he refused, from the danger of approaching them: his predecessor having been troubled with dreadful visions for his presumption, at having only some of

the plates touched which were near them. He tells her that an attempt to change something in the tomb of St. Lawrence, was punished with the death of the monks and churchwarden—that such precious relics as those of the Apostles themselves could not be given ; but a rag, which had approached their bodies would be sufficient to produce miraculous effects. However, as a great favor he promises her some filings of St. Peter's chain, inchased in a key ; supposing the priest, who was authorised to touch this holy jewel, could file a few particles from it ; for the sacred file was endued with such miraculous powers, that it could only procure them for the worthy ; if used for others, it made no more impression than on a rock of adamant. We read and stand amazed at such fooleries, and still more to hear such a man blazoned by Mr. Milner for his " eminent piety, integrity and humility !" The very names of new saints, festivals and litanies with the forms of consecration, would fill a folio, instead of meriting to blot a page. And what is ridiculous enough, the lupercalia or feast of Pan, with all its impurities, received a new title, as the festival of *the Virgin's purification*, with all the heathen rites continued. Temple upon temple, bearing the names of saints new and old, added to their honors, and procured especial patrons for the builders, who became associated in a share of their merits. Shame and indignation blot the catalogue.

CHAPTER III.

ON HERESIES.

THE same heresies continued to afford abundant matter for the polemics of councils, and to exercise the zeal of the orthodox; happy had that zeal been more employed upon their own souls, and the promoting the salvation of others, rather than in hurling anathemas at those who differed from them in opinion; and these opinions only distinguished from their own by shades of differences, perhaps, not affecting the essential truth. Of these I cannot but reckon the Novatians; many of the Donatists: the Nestorians also, I shall hope well of; nor reject the Eutycheans, among whom, with some blameable tenacity for supporting their own particularities, I still trust the truth, as it is in Jesus, remained. Nor shall I utterly reject even the Semi-pelagians, whose errors were of a more suspicious kind.

AN. 521. Curious and unprofitable questions respecting the nature of Christ, chiefly engrossed attention, and were furiously disputed. *Did one of the Trinity suffer?* Was his nature *compounded?* and the like. Thus it will be always observable, that when the substance is lost, men will be contending for the shadow.

An. 545—553. But one of the most pregnant subjects of debate, respected Origen and his disciples, who, smitten by a variety of councils and canons, still continued to maintain their ground. This cause, espoused and defended by Theodore of Cæsaria, excited the warmest emotions; and though condemned and re-condemned, held up its head and flourished. Justinian, who had passed a severe edict against Origen and his followers, was yet greatly influenced by Theodore, an Origenist, and a Monophysite. In order to reduce the *Acephali*, a violent branch of the Monophysites to reunion, and thereby artfully to involve the council of Chalcedon and the Nestorians in the same censure, he persuaded the Emperor, as a conciliatory attempt, to issue an edict, condemning what was called the *three chapters*, or the works of three bishops in the council of Chalcedon, favourable to the Nestorian cause: and thus endeavoured to avenge himself on the Pope Vigilius, and those who had engaged the Emperor to condemn Origen. Vigilius and the African bishops, fired at this attempt, immediately assembled, and condemned the Emperor and his edict, as derogatory to the honor of the three bishops, whose works were censured; and also to the council of Chalcedon, whose authority was so far impeached. Justinian, offended at the opposition of the Roman Pontiff, ordered his appearance at Constantinople; and having got him into his power, compelled his acquiescence on the subject of the *three chapters*: but Vigilius, on his return to Rome, being severely censured by the Illyricum and African bishops, retracted, and in a

new council of seventy bishops, condemned what he had himself subscribed, for else they threatened they would withdraw from his communion, and excommunicate him as an apostate. This provoked a second imperial condemnation of the *three chapters*; and after many altercations and disputes, produced the 5th œcumenical council of Constantinople, which confirmed the Emperor's edict, and condemned *Origen*, and *the three chapters*, as heretical. Vigilius refused his subscription, and the Emperor in wrath ordered him into banishment. A fourth time the infallible Pontiff now changed his opinions, and subscribed the decrees of the council, charging as execrable blasphemies, what he had vindicated as apostolical truth: but many bishops refused their assent, and separated from his communion: and a breach was made, which was for a long while unclosed.

The Donatists favoured by the Vandal conquerors, enjoyed a degree of peace and prosperity; but the opposition of Gregory, and the orthodox, seems to have prevailed; and after the end of the century, we hear little more of these heretics.

The Arians maintained a firmer footing: for a long while protected by the northern clans, whom they had discipled, and making their enemies feel the rigour of their arm. But the Vandals being expelled from Africa, and Italy recovered, these provinces returned to the orthodox faith, and several of the Gothic kings, whether from policy or conviction, changing their opinions, Arianism lost

ground prodigiously before the expiration of this century, and has never since risen into power or eminence: though still bubbling up in the Church to trouble its repose.

The Nestorians in the East were the most zealous Christians, and spread abroad their tenets abundantly. The seat of their patriarch, was Selencia in Persia, from whence their missionaries are said to have extended Christianity into India, Armenia, Arabia, Syria, and all the countries adjacent. Though suffering often under the Persian monarchs, they were more favored than any other sect of professing Christians.

An. 578. One man, by his indefatigable zeal and industry, rivived the expiring cause of the Monophysites: a proof of the power of unwearied labour and great abilities. Scarce a bishop of eminence remained among the Eutycheans, when an obscure person, named *Jacob Baradæus*, a monk, started from his cell, and awakening his brethren to activity, spread the tenets of the Monophysites through Syria, Mesopotamia, Armenia, Egypt, Nubia, and Abyssinia; and dying in the see of Edessa, left a flourishing society of his denomination, who bore the name of *Jacobites* from him, as their restorer. A large body of Christians of that denomination subsists in the East and in Abyssinia; and though Abyssinian Christianity appears reduced very low, in Egypt and Syria they still remain, and the Armenians of that sect are yet numerous and respectable. Different opinions

about curious and speculative points, which it would be useless to particularize, indeed divided them among themselves; but they still formed one body, and maintained communion with each other.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TRUE SPIRITUAL CHURCH.

THE farther we advance the less visible to observation grows the Church of the First-born, whose names are written in Heaven. The turbid atmosphere of Gothic ravages darkened the scene; the heretical prevalence of Arianism during a great part of the century, contributed to extinguish the light in Israel: and Pelagianism, in its branches wide diffused, spread the subtle poison of pride and human sufficiency, through a body already weakened by a thousand wounds, and bleeding at every pore. If we add the reign of superstition; the clouds of locust monks who overspread the earth; the general neglect of the scriptures: the universal ignorance prevalent; and encouraged, in order to give greater weight and importance to the deceivers and jugglers, whose frauds and false miracles supplanted all the necessity of revelation; we shall no longer wonder, that we find so *few* faithful, but that *any* should remain.

AN. 543—582. I have looked at some of the writers of that age, and their works; and I confess I can find little soundness in principle, and less in practice: unless I should exhibit those lights of the Church, Benedict and his associates, whose

multiplied rules for a seraphic life, like the pharisaic traditions mentioned by our Lord, made men only sevenfold more the children of Satan and pride than before. If I take John the Faster; Gregory the Great; or that adulator of the Roman see, Ennodius; alas! the very best of them is sharper than a thorn hedge: more suited to pierce and wound with their asperities and follies, than to feed with any berries of truth, which they produce. Under such tutors, the pupils could receive but miserable information; and ignorance, established as a law, reduced the knowledge of God our Saviour, and faith and true holiness, to a very low standard. Yet the light of Israel was not quite put out; nor the power of divine grace utterly withheld. He that promised to be with, and in his Church always, even to the end of the world, had not forsaken the earth. There were to be found, I doubt not, bishops and congregations, where the truth as it is in Jesus continued to be preached; and, though mixed with some of the superstitions of the day, not destitute of divine influence: and many individuals in simplicity and godly sincerity, followed the adorable Master in the regeneration, without troubling themselves with Aristotle or Plato, and their subtleties or sophisms. The more remote from the scenes of contention, dissipation, and wordly pursuits, were most probably best preserved from the corruption which is in the world through lust.

The disciples of Augustin, in Africa and elsewhere, maintained manfully the doctrines of grace

against the Pelagians, and Semi-Pelagians, who endeavoured to corrupt them, and to introduce the debasing alloys of human sufficiency and proud reasonings: with these we may expect to find a practice correspondent with their principle of faith working by love. In France especially, Lucidus and others, strenuously asserted the evangelical truths against their opposers, and contended for the faith once delivered to the Saints.

Austin, the monk, sent from Gregory, if he had been less eager after archbishoprics, and less chargeable with lying miracles, would have more credit for the numerous conversions of which he boasted; yet it is to be hoped some knowledge of Christ and his gospel had been communicated to the Anglo-Saxons, amidst all the prevailing superstitions, and that some of them believed to the saving of their souls; which would be a nobler reward of his missionary labours, than the metropolitan see.

The mountains of Cambria still afforded a race, if not of primitive Christians, though many such it is to be hoped were among them, yet of men who refused to obey the insolent dictates of Gregory and Austin, though threatened by him with death, for refusing canonical obedience. They chose to keep Easter, and baptize after their ancient mode. I stand astonished at Mr. Milner's credulity, and vindication of these arrogant hierarchs.

The Separatists had a particular call to watchfulness and exemplary conduct. I have ever ex-

pected to find among those, who held the fundamental truths, and were in discipline peculiarly strict, the most truly living members of Christ's body. The Nestorian zeal to spread Christianity in the East, speaks strongly in their favor; and many of like spirit were to be found among the Novatians, Donatists, and Eutycheans—I dare not add the Arians, for I account the denial of the true Deity of the Son of God, mortal error: but among the Semi-pelagians, however in dispute they might contend for human power and perfection by their own exertions, I doubt not some of them were taught by experience for their own salvation, to look to Jesus Christ alone for salvation, and received the grace of God in truth, though fearful of admitting its all-powerful operations, and their hearts sounder than their heads. I remember one of my brethren of this cast, (Mr. Charles Wesley) who, in converse one day, lovingly addressed these words to me, when speaking on the subject of divine grace, "Brother, a weather-beaten Armi-" nian is but one step removed from a moderate "Calvinist."

CENTURY VII.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE EXTENT AND SUFFERINGS OF THE OUTWARD CHURCH.

THE barbarian conquerors had now generally submitted to the religion of the vanquished; and Lombards and Burgundians embraced the orthodox faith. The Anglo-Saxon kings of the heptarchy in England, entered the pale of the Church, many of them at the instigation of their fair consorts; and easily ordered their subjects to be of their master's religion. And as England was famed for virtue and learning in that dark age, missionaries from thence and from Ireland, with St. Columban at their head, issued forth to convert their neighbours. Of these the famous Willebrod, an Anglo-Saxon, and his eleven associates, form an eminent group, by whose indefatigable exertions, the knowledge of Christianity, such as they taught, spread through Batavia, Friesland, Cimbria and Denmark, and procured for the prime Apostle, the archbishopric of Utrecht, as his reward, from the Roman Pontiff. AN. 615.

We will not vouch either for the purity of the doctrines they taught, or of the motives whereby

they were influenced. To rise to eminence in the Church was too flattering; and dominion over the consciences, and consequently the purses of these ignorant catechumens, was readily obtained by these men of Rome, who subjected all their converts to her dominion and supremacy: and were supported, patronised, and bishoped by her patriarch. Yet some of them, I trust, were animated by the purest motives; and, if in others a mixture of zeal and superstition was found, the object of their labours was the conversion of the heathen, and not wordly aggrandisement.

An. 610. The Jews in Spain and Gaul continued to be discipled by the sword, and driven within the pale of the Church, whilst the zealous Heraclius in the East dragged them to the fonts, in his dominions, and nobly baptised them in multitudes: converts, I acknowledge, that forbid all boasting. But the labours of the Nestorian Christians open a more pleasing prospect, from their patriarchate of Seleucia issuing forth on every side. Their missionary efforts appear as extensive as blessed, penetrating into India, China, and the immense nations of barbarians on their northern confines, even unto Scythia and Siberia; a famous monument of which is said to have been discovered by the Jesuits in the last century, and other authentic records mention a Nestorian patriarch sent thither from Seleucia.

All outward persecution against the Church as a body, had subsided, and except now and then,

some scenes of transitory oppression in Persia, and turbulent attacks of implacable enmity from the Jews in Syria and Palestine, the world was comparatively at ease; or rather lulled into the profound sleep of ignorance, superstition, and monkery. A stupid external system of pompous devotion, performed by a kind of machinery, included all the services of the Church.

But now God was preparing a scourge, whose heavy hand to this day continues to be felt, and whose tyranny has nearly extinguished the Christian name from the pillars of Hercules, to the remotest East; where Mahometan darkness covers the earth, and its gross darkness the people. In the country where first the Lord of life and glory drew his breath, and all the scenes of labours and sufferings of the first Apostles were displayed—in those flourishing Churches through Asia and Greece, to which most of the sacred epistles are directed, there at present the abominations of the impostor and false prophet, Mahomet, are seen standing in the holy places, and the crescent has supplanted the cross—so truly doth God make a fruitful land barren for the iniquity of those who dwelt therein.

An. 622. In the beginning of this century arose the famed Mahomet, a man endowed with every talent for lifting himself to eminence in this world: deep contrivance, a noble person, ready elocution, invincible perseverance, and intrepid courage. He had exercised the business of a merchant in Ara-

bia, and by travelling had gained a thorough knowledge of the country and its inhabitants. The Christianity there professed, had been debased by superstition, and mixed with heathenism. He conceived therefore, and executed, the vast project of erecting the fabric of a new religion, of which he was ambitious to be regarded as the founder and prophet. Adopting the leading article of the Christian and Jewish faith, *the unity of the Godhead*, and manifesting the highest reverence for the one Jehovah, he marked every species of polytheism and idolatry with the deepest abhorrence. He pretended a divine commission for reforming the prevalent abuses among Jews and Christians; and to bring them back to the pristine and patriarchal religion. But knowing those with whom he had to do, and the general practice of polygamy in the East, and among the Arabs, he engrafted this custom into his religious system, and thus connected the most plausible point of doctrine, with the most seductive and indulgent practice.

I am forbidden by my necessary brevity to dwell on the character or institutions of Mahomet: and shall only observe the consummate skill which he shewed in seizing the auspicious moment, and in using the proper means, suited for the accomplishment of his purpose; improving every advantage and incident to promote the object he had in view. Whether he was illiterate, fanatic, or impostêr, certain it is he was a great man: and the success which crowned his enterprizes is a proof of the wisdom wherewith they were planned, and

the vigour with which they were executed. He saw the Christians divided, disputing, and one party harassing and persecuting the other. The Monophysites and Nestorians, ready to revolt against the ill usage they had received; and to embrace any protector, who would shield them from their oppressors—Arabia ignorant, and half pagan, prepared to turn with every wind of doctrine—distant from the seat of empire—and the Emperor Heraclius taken up with concerns nearer at home and of more importance than those of a province at the extremity of his dominions—the people around him naturally turbulent and warlike, and if united under one head, sure to form a tremendous military force. His friends and connections were considerable; but the consciousness of his own native powers afforded him surer resources. He began covertly, and with small essays: success beyond his most sanguine expectations, emboldened his confidence, and he burst forth as a torrent on every side. All submitted to his arms, and generally embraced his victorious religion. His followers were naturally attached to him by the strongest ties, the love of war, and the love of women. And as in the indulgence of these, heaven also could be attained as the final recompense, it is impossible not to perceive the astonishing advantages which he possessed. His army, fired by religious enthusiasm, and pursuing the most desirable objects of the corrupted heart, power, wealth, and sensual gratifications, seconded with all their might the designs of their politic leader.

Arabia submitted during the life of Mahomet. A solid dominion acquired, and forces trained to conquest ready for farther enterprises, afforded his successors an easy conquest through the East, in Egypt and Africa. They cut off from the Roman Empire its noblest provinces: and threatened to subjugate the whole, had not the dissentions of ambition among the Caliphs themselves, the successors of the pretended prophet, turned their swords against each other, and retarded in domestic quarrels, the ruin, that rising as a flood, threatened to deluge the empire and the habitable globe.

The policy of the imposter contributed equally with his arms to spread his dominion. He contrived to set the Christians against the Christians. Proffered liberty of conscience and possession of property to all who submitted, and who paid probably no more taxes, and perhaps less than they had done to the rapacious governors who plundered the provinces. The persecuted Nestorians and Monophysites, he cherished, and gained by his protection and liberality: and only wreaked his vengeance on those who resisted his power.

If he supported his cause and endeavoured to extricate himself from embarrassments, by pretended visions and revelations, this was only what the monks and superstitious had taught him, and contained nothing very extraordinary. He might fairly play off their own artillery against them, and with greater advantages impose on the credulity of the populace, and secure the interested sup-

port of his associates. The gross ignorance which every where prevailed; the grievous corruptions of doctrine and manners; the bitter quarrels fomented among Christians; and their irreconcileable enmity and anathemas against each other; rendered them not only an easy conquest, but as easy converts to the new religion: wherein Christ, with Moses, held a high rank among the prophets, little more degraded than he had been by many professing Christian teachers; besides, the new religion, with all the externals of fasting and prayer, and alms-giving strictly enjoined, continued as abundantly to gratify the pride and self-righteousness of the unhumbled heart, as the sensual indulgencies allowed, afforded to the flesh all its most coveted gratifications. With such an army and such a religion, it is impossible, but that, as the state of the world was then circumstanced, and considering human nature in general, the conversions should be immense, as the conquests were rapid.

How much the Christians suffered during these conflicts it is easy to conceive, where resistance was death or slavery. And even the promised indulgences, when once the Mahomedan power was established, became restricted. Oppression succeeded protection, and the zealous Caliphs used every art and violence to make their religion as universally triumphant as their arms.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE INTERNAL STATE OF THE CHURCH.

NOTHING can exhibit a more deplorable object than the state of the Church during this century. The ignorance that was universal and profound will hardly be credited. Many of the bishops themselves, neither able to write nor read, were sunk nearly into the same mental imbecility as their ignorant flocks ; yet at the same time exhibited in public all the pomp of thrones : vestments daubed with gold and silver ; crosiers, embellished with the most precious stones : and ceremonies, instead of vital religion, that required a master to teach, and some memory to retain. The monks had monopolised in their convents, the very rags of science which remained ; and attempted to adorn their few and puerile performances with the extravagances of legendary saints, and quotations called *chains*, of ill tacked extracts from the fathers. But above all, they cultivated the splendid glory of polemic disputation, in order to confound, if they could not confute, the heretics. These also liberally furnished themselves with the same weapons, which introduced the study of Aristotle, and expelled Plato. The beautiful subtleties of sophistical syllogism enabled the disputants to divide the hair of

controverted points, which neither understood; and prove it, when split, to be alter, or idem, or tertium quid: with quid-dities, and quodities, and entities, and a profundity of like wisdom, that made an admiring audience gape, or the listening pupil stand amazed, lost in the depths of this unfathomable learning.

The admired writers of the day, trained up in these schools of monstrous erudition, imitated their subtle and seraphic masters. The great Bishop of Saragossa produced his miserable farrago of *sentences* from Gregory and Austin, ill assorted and tacked together, which procured for his eminence from his learned brethren, the titles of *Salt of the Earth*, and *Light of the World*, but the salt indeed had lost its savour, and the light was become darkness which might be felt. A few unmeaning homilies, composed in this stile of quotations, supplied a preached gospel, and were handed from one to another, much like Dr. Trustler's publications of our day, to the clergy, who have no time to copy for themselves. Such clerical aids were provided by the famed Bishop of Arles, Cæsarius, and the Bishop of Noyon the revered St. Eloi. And the Greeks were hardly behind the Latins in ignorance, though an affectation of rhetorical bombast, and the highly esteemed allegorical and mystical obscurities of interpretation, cast a false glare around their darkness visible.

An. 660. Monastic rules, and directions for the attainment of the supposed highest perfection of our nature, led men wholly off from the one great

line of faith and holiness revealed in the book of God. Hence sprung the famous *penetentiary* of Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, describing all the various sins, and their shades of evil, accurately distinguished and regularly classed, according to time, place, circumstance, and intention of the offender, in order that the clergy might form an exact scale of penance proportioned to the offence. And these fooleries gained a high reputation, and became very generally adopted: whilst the doctrine of justification by faith through the blood of Jesus alone, was forgotten, and sanctification of the Spirit superseded by practising these prescriptions of self-instituted mortification, penance and oblations, till all real religion was lost in forms and ceremonies.

The vices of the clergy and people bore a pretty exact proportion with their ignorance. It is afflicting to hear the unanimous voice of the age. To mention the charges would only excite indignation, and often offend decency. The moral instructions were included in a description of certain principal virtues, and those treated in the most jejune manner. And a remedy was ready for every violation in penance and alms, and for the greatest crimes, by building or retiring to a monastery.

I cannot perhaps elucidate the subject more fully, than by translating a *beautiful* specimen of the divinity of the day, descriptive of the character of a good Christian, exhibited to our view by the highly revered St. Eloi, bishop of Noyon, in one of his famous homilies.

"He is the *good Christian*, who comes often to "Church, and brings his oblation to be presented "on God's altar—who presumes not to taste of the "fruits he hath gathered, till he hath first made "his offering of them to God—who on the return "of the sacred solemnities, for many days preced- "ing observes a sacred continence, even from his "own wife, that he may approach God's altar with "a safe conscience—and who can repeat by me- "mory the Creed and the Lord's Prayer." Such good Christians!

Again, "redeem your souls from the punish- "ment due to your sins, whilst you have the reme- "dies in your power. Offer your tithes and obla- "tions to the churches—light up candles in the "consecrated places according to your abilities— "come frequently to church, and with all humi- "lity pray to the saints for their patronage and "protection: which things if ye do, when at the "last day you stand at the tremendous bar of the "eternal Judge, ye may say confidently to him, "Give, Lord, because I have given." *Da domine, quia dedi!*

No man stood higher on the scale of piety, wisdom and sanctity, than St. Eloi, as will appear by the singular gifts of a miraculous nature with which he was especially furnished. One of these the writer of his life dwells upon with singular complacence.

"Respecting this most holy personage, besides "his other miraculous virtues, one was especially "bestowed on him of the Lord; for, on his dili-

" gent search, and persevering with singular ardor " of faith in this investigation, many bodies of holy " martyrs, concealed from human knowledge for " ages, were discovered to him, and brought to " light." The reader probably will either smile, or groan, as he feels himself affected, over the corpses of St. Quintin, St. Plato, St. Crispin, St. Crispinian, St. Lucian, and other worthies of this kind, smelt out by the inimitable nostrils of St. Eloi, bishop of Noyon; and after hundreds of years of putrefaction, identified by this most accurate investigator. Under such admired bishops, what must be the state of the miserable people! But these relics raised the holy prelate to the summit of human reverence, and filled the coffers of his see with the most abundant oblations. The life of faith in the Son of God, and divine influence derived from his Spirit, had opened the way to heaven and glory for the primitive saints; but St. Eloi and his fellows, had found out a shorter road, by the purchase of relics, and oblations to the Church and her ministers: and if any man presumed to doubt the relics, or their efficacy, or those who produced them, irrefragable arguments were at hand to convince the most obdurate sceptic, in *the authority of the Catholic Church*, and *the multitude of miracles wrought by them*. The inestimable value of these things may be judged by the lamentations of a famous author of Palestine, named Antiochus, who deplores the loss of a piece of the wood of the true cross, carried off by the Persians, as among the most afflictive calamities affecting the Church of God.

CHAPTER III.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT, RITES AND CEREMONIES.

THE bitter contests between Rome and Constantinople for the supremacy, proceeded to a final rupture between the Eastern and Western Churches; which, however frequent attempts were made to reconcile them, continues yet unclosed. The one too proud to receive an equal, the other to bear a superior. It is pretended, though on dubious evidence, that Boniface the Third engaged Phocas, the Eastern Emperor, to withdraw the title *œcumenical* from the Bishop of Constantinople, his rival, and to confer it on himself, as the price of espousing his interest; though his hands were yet reeking with the blood of the Emperor Mauritius, whose throne he had usurped. AN. 602. Yet certain it is, that notwithstanding all the craft and intrigue to enlarge the authority of Rome, and to create one supreme and visible head of all the churches, this still met with great opposition from many monarchs and bishops in the West, and in the East few submitted themselves to the tyrant's patent; but maintained their obedience to Constantinople. The ancient Britons and Scots were very refractory, and often disputed the Pontiff's mandate. The churches of Gaul and Spain chose to reject what they esteemed an infringement of their liberties; and even in Italy the bishop of

Ravenna and others, refused implicit submission. In order to strengthen the authority of the Roman see, her politic pontiffs contrived to attach the monks to her obedience, by encouraging them to quarrel with the bishops, and transfer their allegiance to Rome. A vast army was thus enlisted throughout the world to magnify the beast, and exalt his supremacy. Securing by their devotedness to Rome, a protector of their immunities, they were sure to find there a more indulgent superior, than when under the nearer eye of their own immediate prelates; by this means all the most arrogant pretensions of the most insolent pontiffs, found a host of defenders, and the most blasphemous ideas were broached, as if every disobedience to these wicked men, was rebellion against God, in his vicegerent upon earth. Thus wealth accumulating, and power increasing, through the West, a dominion grew up, which in the succeeding ages launched its thunders against monarchs, and brought the proudest to the feet of the triple crown, which those Roman Pontiffs assumed.

An. 629. Every head of the Church distinguished his reign by the invention of some new holiday, and the addition of new rites and ceremonies. The *festival of the Cross* was thus instituted, the relics of which were esteemed so inestimably precious, and so diligently collected, that, after all the deeply deplored losses by infidels, more pieces of the wood were produced, than ever Simon the Cyrenian carried; and which, by some strange

magic, had been preserved incorruptible six or seven hundred years, and found in such a variety of pieces and places, as was indeed ridiculously miraculous; but there was nothing too gross for that superstitious age to swallow, nor any fraud too impudent for that infallible see to invent. Vestments multiplied into wardrobes of gold and silver tissue in all the churches, with the richest chalices, crosiers, crosses, shrines, too numberless to admit of detail. And now the sanctity of the churches grew to such an eminence, that they afforded a sanctuary to the most atrocious criminals, from whence they might not be taken by any process of civil justice, and where they were supported by the alms of false charity.

Hitherto the Emperor maintained the power of confirming the election of the bishops of Rome, though he remitted the fine, usually before paid to the imperial treasury. The scriptures were still in the hands of all Christians, and they read them without restraint; and it is evident from the renowned summary of Ildephonsus, that *transubstantiation* had not been yet invented, however extravagantly the sacrament of the Lord's Supper had been spoken of; and its celebration loaded with endless ceremonies, and all the possible pomp of pageantry and dress.

I mention none of the writers in the Church of this age, because I find none worth mentioning. I have given a specimen of two or three of their works, and may truly say *ex uno disce omnes*. They

contain literally nothing that will ever repay the loss of time in reading them. It may perhaps deserve a particular remark, that at the very time when Boniface the third received from the usurper Phocas, the title of *universal bishop*, and claimed dominion over the consciences of men, then arose the great Eastern imposter Mahomet, which marks the commencement of the seventh century as a very memorable period.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCHISMS AND HERESIES WHICH DISTRACTED THE CHURCH.

THE old heresies remained to trouble the peace and provoke the censures of the Church. The Arians, though declining, were numerous, and the Semi-pelagians maintained sharp warfare against Augustin and his disciples, in Gaul and Britain. There also important disputes had taken place, respecting baptism, the clerical tonsure, and the time for the celebration of Easter; trifles then of the last importance, and exercising the wisdom of synods, and the keenness of polemic rage, as much and more than the very essentials of Christianity. In the East two heresies were revived, and cast into new modes and figures; they were maintained with all the niceties of Aristotelian subtlety of dispute; and exercised the genius, and wakened up the jealousy of the church rulers.

I. The *Paulicians* are reported by their persecutors to have been a branch of the Manicheans, and from two brothers, named Paul and John, received the doctrines of Manes new modelled. The imperfect account given of them, and that by their enemies, is to be read with suspicion by all who know the spirit of those times. Their great-

est errors, if indeed they held them, which was dubious, seem to have been, in supposing "the "world not created by the true Jehovah, but by "some evil dæmon"—denying the authority of the Old Testament, and a part of the New; though they read the Scriptures, and opposed their being confined to the clergy. They also regarded the sacraments as merely allegorical, and not literally to be observed; but they added other still more intolerable blasphemies against the reigning religion of that day, "treating the Virgin Mary "contemptuously," refusing her worship and festivals, and suggesting that she had other children beside Jesus—with equal contempt they treated the cross and its worship and holidays, allowing no homage to this precious wood—and in their church assemblies, abolishing the names of bishops and presbyters, they instituted a set of pastors with perfect equality, without any peculiar rights, privileges, or garb, to distinguish them from the people. Suppressed by the strong arm of power and penal laws, as well as by anathemas of councils, this sect maintained still in secret its influence; and though kept down, continued to spread, and burst out with more violence in the succeeding ages, and occasioned much tumult and bloodshed. But who can say whether offending or offended? How often hath innocence, driven to despair by oppression, been charged with every crime? In this century these heretics created but little disturbance.

II. The *Monophysites* protected in Persia, and more favoured by Mahomet and his successors, however bitterly persecuted by the Greeks, flourished in the East, and in Egypt, where the Saracen conquerors took them into their special protection. The Christians of the Greek church had exasperated them by their oppressions and persecutions; and now, they in their turn, supported their Mahometan protectors, and strengthened their hands. Heraclius observed with sorrow, the mischief occasioned to the empire, by the unchristian, as well as impolitic persecutions, which had driven out so numerous a body of subjects, and forced them into the hands of his enemies. Impressed with this idea, he held a conference with Paul and Athanasius, the heads of this sect, on the properest methods of their re-union, and return to the Greek church; and what temperament could be found to reconcile the contending parties. Glad to embrace so auspicious an opening, these principals of this dissenting party assured the Emperor, that the spirit of concord might be restored, provided the Greeks would admit, that after the union of the two natures in Christ, there was but *one will* or *operation* concurrent of the human with the divine; that in this case the *Monotholites*, (the name now assumed) would receive the council of Chalcedon, and live in peace with their brethren. Heraclius consulted the Patriarch of Constantinople, Sergius; who, either ignorant of the nature of man, or of the subject in dispute; or inclined, as it is said, to the Monotholite doctrine, strengthened with his suffrage, the adoption of this new explanation given,

as consistent with the catholic faith and the decrees of Chalcedon; and an imperial edict published the peace of the Church and the reconciliation of the Monotholites. AN 622.

At first this scheme promised the happiest success, and a synod, assembled at Alexandria, confirmed the tenor of the edict, and admitted the soundness of the doctrine of the Monotholites: multitudes of whom, in consequence, returned into the communion of the established Church. But alas! the spirit of bigotry and discord admitted no such pacificatory methods long to maintain the quiet of the Church and the empire. A turbulent monk, named Sophronius, had violently opposed the decree at the synod of Alexandria, and having been raised to the see of Jerusalem, he summoned another council there, in which all the anathemas before denounced against the Monophysites, were renewed against the Monotholites. The cry of heresy was the war-whoop of that day, and each side prepared himself for the battle. To secure the Roman Pontiff was a great object. At this Sophronius and Sergius laboured with all diligence and intrigue. The Patriarch of Constantinople prevailed; and Honorius, either ignorant of the merits of the question, gained by the Emperor, or taken in by the artful representations of Sergius, gave his suffrage for the *one will*, and *operation*: but the breach was opened, and pride and contention employed all their efforts to widen it.

An. 638. The Emperor Heraclius, to silence the angry disputants, issued a second edict, called the *ecthesis*, and said to be composed by Sergius the patriarch of Constantinople, forbidding all controversies on the subject, and leaving the *one will* in possession of orthodoxy. To this the succeeding patriarch Pyrrhus, and the bishops of the East submitted quietly; but in the West the case was very different. The Roman Pontiff, stimulated by Sophronius, assembled a fresh council, condemned the decision of his predecessor Honorius, and the *ecthesis* of the Emperor, and sharpened all the Church's artillery afresh, in anathemas against the Monotholites.

An. 641. The flame of controversy now burst forth more fiercely than ever; nor had the decree of the Emperor Constans, who succeeded Heraclius, though suppressing the *ecthesis*, and enjoining silence on all parties, a happier issue; for alas! he had to do with men, who, however ignorant and profligate, were so tremblingly alive to the most distant approaches of heresy, that they resolved to find or make matter of condemnation in the last edict, as in the former: and Martin of Rome, at the head of an hundred and five bishops, condemned both the edicts of the Emperors, and consigned over to the devil and his angels, to all eternity, the Monotholites, and whoever patronized them.

The Emperor Constans resolved not to put up with this affront from the insolent Pontiff of Rome, and ordered him to be seized and banished to the

Isle of Naxos. Others, who were the more turbulent, were exiled into different places: and for a while the peace of the Church was maintained by the high hand of imperial authority. The two successors in the Roman see overawed, and perhaps men of more moderation, kept things quiet during the reign of Constans: but under his son and successor, Pogonatus, the fire which had been long smothering beneath the ruins, burst forth with redoubled violence, and called for a sixth œcumenical council at Constantinople, to settle this knotty subject. AN 680. Pogonatus, gained by Agatho, Bishop of Rome, consented to the condemnation of the Monotholites, and Pope Honorius, with all the preceding edicts; and sanctioned by penal laws, and the imperial authority, the decrees of the council against all opposers. Thus was the controversy finally decided, and the Monotholites suppressed throughout the empire. A branch of them however took root in the fastnesses of Mount Libanus, where, from their leader Maro, they gained the name of Maronites, and subsist unto this present day, though it is said for a long while reconciled to the church of Rome. A supplemental council met at the end of the century, to settle the important subject of forms and ceremonies, &c. Among other decisions of which, I shall only remark two; the allowance of priests to marry; and the settling the equal rank of the bishops of Rome and Constantinople. AN. 691.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRUE SPIRITUAL CHURCH OF CHRIST.

WHOEVER casts his eye over the dreary scene described, will be constrained to acknowledge how little of true religion could possibly remain in the Church of Rome, corrupt in all the superior branches, and contaminated by such examples: where ignorance sat enthroned, and all zeal was expended on idle ceremonies or trifling disputes. Yet had not the Lord left his Church without witnesses. I cannot but be confident that many such remained, though hidden from observation, and claiming no attention from the great saints and polemics of that day. The highly exemplary zeal of the Nestorians to spread the knowledge of Christ through the dark regions of the East, and the extent and success of their labours, suggest a strong evidence that the religion of the Son of God was cultivated in its power and divine influence among many of them.

Nor shall I hastily believe all that their enemies charge on the Paulicians, when I see such favourable appearances of an attempt to oppose the reigning superstitions, and to reform the abuses in church government. Though, as it is usually the case in this matter, that, like the vibrations of the

pendulum when extreme on one hand, its oscillations are naturally as extreme on the other. I hope, however, that they who read the Scriptures of the New Testament, and refused the worship of the Virgin and the Cross, reserved their adoration for him who died upon it; and that the reduction of their ritual to greater simplicity, proved a more devotional spirit, and a truer simplicity of heart. Within the catholic pale itself, though the candle burnt but dimly, clouded with superstition and ignorance, yet was not the light utterly extinguished. Amidst the efforts to promote Christianity in the lands of pagan ignorance, some real religion stimulated the zealous missionaries; and in the different fields where they laboured, true converts, it must be hoped, were made to the faith of Christ.

The churches of England and Scotland, according to the testimony of the venerable Bede, rejected the imperious claims of Rome and her legates; maintained their independence, and seem not as yet destitute of that liberty, known by all in whom the Spirit of the Lord is.

At the close of this century also, the first traces appear of a small but precious body, afterwards named Valdenses, which some suppose a branch of the Paulicians. Retiring from the insolences and oppressions of the Romish clergy, and disgusted with their vices, they sought a hiding place in the secluded vallies of the Pais de Vaud, embosomed by the Alps, and removed from the observation of their persecutors, where they might

enjoy purer worship, and communion with God. The origin of this stock of reformation cannot perhaps be exactly ascertained. They themselves affirm, that they began to separate themselves from the corruptions of the Romish Church about three hundred years after the reign of Constantine. Reinerus, who from an apostate among them, as is usually the case, turned a most envenomed persecutor, complains, "That no other heretics had "given the Church of Rome so much disturbance: "being of very ancient origin, widely dispersed, "and bearing the strongest appearances of piety "and the true faith." He speaks of them under the name of *Leonists*, as a sect which had subsisted more than five hundred years. Their name of Valdenses is said by some to be derived from a teacher of eminence among them, cotemporary with Berengarius, but rather probably from the vallies where they first took refuge. Their beginnings were indeed small, but they had in time great increase, and the vital spark of heavenly fire seems to have been in an especial manner preserved in this wilderness

Neither numbers, power, nor greatness constitute the Church. No man can belong to it, who is not joined to the Lord in one Spirit; and however reduced the body may be to appearance, yet like the seven thousand in Israel who would not bow the knee to Baal, Christ still had his remnant, according to the eternal council of his will. The foundation of the Church stood secure: the Lord knew those that were his in the darkest hour of the deepest apostacy.

CENTURY VIII.

CHAPTER I.

THE EXTERNAL STATE OF THE CHURCH.

THE farther we advance in our pursuit, the deeper the darkness thickens around us. All is a dreary blank of ignorance, superstition, and unchristian contentions; and if, here and there, a lucid beam darts athwart the path, it is but as the shooting meteor of the night, and as quickly extinguished.

The Church seems to have lost every thing, which gave it characteristic excellence, purity of doctrine, and real sanctity of manners; and glittering in the tinsel ornaments with which human pride had arrayed her, stood confessed the whore sitting on the seven mountains, and filling the earth with the wine of her fornication. It is painful to pursue the progress of fraud, ambition, and vice, rising to its summit over an abject world, and to lament, even over many of the boasted conquests of the Church, as almost equally deplorable with her sufferings.

In the East the Saracens continued to spread their arms and religion through Asia and Africa, inflicting upon the vanquished Christians the mise-

ries and oppressions which a new dominion and a different religion necessarily brought in their train; whilst the distracted state of the eastern empire prevented all vigorous opposition, and left the provinces an easy prey to the ravagers. Indeed, had not their own intestine quarrels prevented, the whole must have fallen before the victorious Caliphs. For at Constantinople all was confusion and contest; Emperor after Emperor was dethroned, and banished; the struggles for dominion engaged them in domestic wars and intrigues; whilst the divisions in the Church, carried on with equal inveteracy, though their saracenic foes were at the door, palsied the arm of resistance; biting and devouring one another, they invited their enemies to seize the desolated empire.

A new enemy also, the Turks, from the wilds of mount Caucasus, bursting forth as a flood, swept the plains of Armenia, Albania and Colchis, and vanquishing the saracenic hosts, turned their arms against the Grecian Emperors, and proved a dreadful scourge to all the Christians, as far as their ravages extended; and more than balanced the successes which the good Nestorians are reported to have gained in the country within Mount Imaus, the seat of the Mongal, Usbek, Calmuc, and Nogaian Tartars. As these enlargements of the Christian pale were attended with no weapons but persuasion, and effected purely by the zeal of the missionaries, we may hope there was a real presence and power of God attending their ministrations, and a Christianity of a very different cast from what

will be seen in the west, where the sword of Charlemagne appears to have produced greater effects than the sword of the gospel.

As the concerns of the Church in the West will become the chief object of attention, to those I shall particularly advert.

AN. 711—714. The SARACENS passing the Straits of Gibraltar, had rushed like a torrent into Spain, and extended their conquests to the mouths of the Rhone: Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, and part of Italy suffered by their ravages. The Grecian Emperors could oppose but a feeble barrier to their progress, and had not the Gallic arms resisted their encroachments, and checked their career, Europe seemed ready to fall under the Mahometan yoke. Though submission to the conquerors secured life, and some of its advantages, yet the sufferings and oppression of the Christians were great, and their number awfully diminished by conversion to the dominant religion; with which in every country, they who have no religion will easily incorporate. The churches were turned into mosques, and frequented as before. Ignorance, superstition and apostacy from all Christian godliness had made the transition imperceptible; and as every worldly inducement was held out by the conquerors, to seduce their subjects to Mahomedism, the number of those who professed Christianity, and dared to suffer for it the loss of all things, was comparatively small. The rest were a too easy prey for delusion; nor indeed did they either gain or lose spirituality by the change of their religion, as they continued

exactly the same men; with regard to any real excellence, their former Christianity gave them none.

The greater part of Germany, and the North, continued yet in pagan ignorance, and notwithstanding the efforts of the Anglo Saxon missionaries, the progress hitherto made appears not to have been great. AN. 715. An English benedictine monk, called Winifrid, and afterwards more distinguished by the name of Boniface, became the chief apostle of the Germans, and with other associates, under royal patronage, boasted of the thousands or rather millions of their converts. It must be confessed, Boniface was little formed on the apostolic model: his zeal was furious, and all meaus lawful which could contribute to the end he had in view. The secular arm, and all the pious frauds then in use, he failed not to employ with success. profoundly ignorant himself of the true nature of that gospel which he affected to proclaim, and more fiercely set on advancing the interests of Rome, and his own sacerdotal importance, than to form disciples of the lowly Jesus, he and his associates vigorously attacked these illiterate barbarians, to bow their necks in subjection to the papal dominion, and waited to receive the abundance of of ecclesiastical honors, as the reward of their toil. The Gallic monarchs who extended their conquests through the North, hoped by propagating Christianity among the pagans, to soften the ferocious manners of their newly acquired subjects; and at the same time, by acts of splendid piety and church

endowments to *redeem their own souls* from the dreadful crimes that generally marked their rule. Such monarchs and such missionaries were too correspondent; and their exactions on their new converts more than once occasioned fearful tumults and rebellions; so that Alcuin, the famous tutor of Charlemagne, and a partial relator, acknowledges, "they were more intent upon tythes than truth, "and deserved the title of plunderers rather than "preachers."

An. 714. After Clovis, the King of the Franks, whose conversion we have recorded, the monarchs descending from him were but a feeble and degenerate race. The first officer under them, called the Mayor of the Palace, having all the administration of affairs lodged in his hands, grew by degrees above his masters. The famous Martel, Mayor to Childeric, distinguished himself by his opposition to the Saracens, who having passed the Straits of Gibraltar and conquered Spain, threatened to spread over Europe; but were checked in their career by his victorious arms. Radbod, King of the Frieslanders, also felt and acknowledged his superiority. Boniface, who in discouragement had returned to England, was called back and strongly supported by the conqueror; and with a number of fresh associates, preached with great success among the Frieslanders, Hessians, and Thuringians, for whom the superstitious piety of the Gallic monarchs founded bishoprics in abundance, over which Boniface was appointed archbishop at Mentz.

An. 752. Pepin, who succeeded Martel, as Mayor of the Palace, thought he might now safely seize the throne, as he already possessed the power; and having secured the suffrage of the states in France, they advised him to consult the Pope upon the lawfulness of the act; that so he might do it under the sanction of the Church *with a good conscience*. Zachary, Bishop of Rome, being previously gained, and needing the Gallic monarch to protect him from the Greeks and Lombards, and raise him to the supremacy which he coveted, gave his opinion, that, "the divine "law permitted the indolent monarch of a war-"like people, to be dethroned by one more worthy "to rule." Under this sanction, without opposition, Childeric was deposed, and Pepin stepped into the throne of his master, assuming the name of King, as he had before exercised the authority. As a *most Christian King* therefore, he now became in duty bound to support the see of Rome, that had so cordially seconded his views. The decision of Zachary was confirmed by Stephen, his successor, who came to France to solicit help from Pepin against the Lombards; and as an easy price for it, solemnly absolved him from the oath of fidelity and allegiance to his king, which he had broken, and crowned and anointed him and his sons, in order to render his person more sacred, and his dominion more revered by his subjects.

The interests of the Church were thus strongly secured by these aspiring pontiffs, and the kings

of France bound to advance the spiritual dominion of those who had been such friendly casuists, to seat them on the throne.

An. 726. The contest about images, of which I shall elsewhere speak, had occasioned much tumult in Italy. The Pope was in opposition to the Emperor: the Lombard kings profited by the contentions, and seized Ravenna and other Grecian possessions, and attempted the reduction of Rome and all Italy to their dominion. The affrighted Pope therefore summoned Pepin to his assistance. Pepin, grateful, passed the Alps, and having conquered the exarchate of Ravenna from the Lombard king, compelled him to cede that principality to the Roman Pontiff. But the Lombard repenting the treaty he had made, renewed the war and seized upon the city. This brought Pepin again to the Pope's assistance. The King of Lombardy was vanquished, and compelled to evacuate a farther extent of territory; all which the King of France bestowed on the Roman see, and thereby laid the foundation of all her future greatness.

On the death of Pepin, the Lombard monarch made a fresh attempt to recover his lost dominions. The fugitive Pope fled for succour to Charles, the successor of Pepin, who received him with great respect, and with pleasure embraced the opportunity of passing the Alps, and carrying his victorious arms into Italy. His success was complete.

He routed the Lombard army, seized the throne and person of the monarch, and put a final period to the Lombard kingdom in Italy. AN. 768.

The crafty Pope came in for a large share of the spoil; and Charles added considerably to the former grants, with an especial view, as the holy Pontiff suggests, that the King of France might thus *atone for his sins*; for in that age, no more effectual method could be suggested, than by enriching the Church, and interesting thereby her ministers to intercede for the royal culprit.

Charles, surnamed *Charlemagne*, or the GREAT, meant by these acts of pious benevolence, not only to secure *the salvation of his soul*, but politically to advance his own interests and ambitious designs; intending, with the Pope's approbation, to raise himself to imperial state, and assume the rank from which the debased condition of the Grecian Empire was degrading the sovereigns of the East. Accordingly in the last year of the century, being on a visit to the Roman Pontiff, it was resolved that Charles should be inaugurated with the purple mantle, and raised to the empire of the West. His election was speedily determined, his imperial titles proclaimed, and himself solemnly consecrated by the much obliged and obsequious Roman Pontiff.

AN. 800. During these expeditions, the Saxons, only nominally subdued, revolted against Charles, and being vanquished, after a severe struggle, he attempted to break their savage spirit, by converting them to Christianity; but their resistance

being obstinate, and their seditions renewed, he resolved to compel them to come within the pale of the Church ; and a missionary army drove the enslaved Saxons by troops to the missionary baptists. Caresses and rewards seconding the threats of vengeance, the nation in general accepted the offer to become Christians, in preference to be made slaves, and were baptised by thousands.

CHAPTER II.

THE INTERNAL STATE OF THE CHURCH.

NOTHING could present a more dreary scene than the internal state of the Church in this century; ravaged with wars in the East, and by the spreading conquests of the Saracens in Spain, Sicily, Sardinia and Calabria. Meanwhile, the progress of superstition was rapid in proportion to the wealth and power unto which the Church-rulers were advancing. The knowledge pursued was of the most superficial kind; and the profoundest ignorance of the most important truths of real Christianity universally prevalent. The quarrels between Constantinople and Rome were the most bitter and scandalous, and a precedent afforded for the same prelatical contests for dominion and extension of authority, every where. The clergy were contaminated with the most scandalous vices, manifest in the canons made to restrain them; and naturally resulting from the wealth and indulgencies in which they wallowed, the reverence they had contrived to attract from their office, and the impunity it generally secured: sure to be skreened by their brethern from disgrace, for the honour of the Church.

As the northern nations had generally adopted the druidical superstitions, in which the priesthood

had very peculiar privileges; these, on their conversion, the new priesthood endeavoured to secure unto themselves: and the Papal see being the great object of monkish reverence and missionary zeal, to this a wondrous measure of blind obedience was transferred.

The strongly inculcated doctrine, which always was the darling theme of the clergy, of the high merit of liberal donations to the Church, poured in a flood of wealth and possessions upon it in every place. No man living or dying failed to interest some saint or other in his favour: and as the opulent, the warrior, and the monarch, were usually the most profligate, and led to the commission of the most atrocious crimes, they had it in their power *to redeem their souls* at an easy price, by sharing with the Church and her saints, the fruits of their plunder, rapine and murders; by founding monasteries, building churches, and enriching the ministers of religion; who not only thus pronounced their absolution, and relieved them from the pains due to their sins, but associated them in all the merits of saints and martyrs. Emperors, and monarchs, and wealthy nobles, not only now gave them gold, silver, vestments, but estates, dignities, feudal tenures. Thus the bishops became dukes, counts, marquisses, invested with regalia in their own domains: administering justice; supreme in their several seignieuries; and often heading armies, which they levied, to follow as feudal barons the quarrels of their liege lord, or to decide contentions among themselves. Of these the Roman

pontiffs, through the munificence of the Gallic monarchs, had the most abundant share; and being set up as the object of prime veneration, and appealed to in all difficulties and quarrels in the Western world, the immensity of wealth and power which flowed into them from a thousand channels, is scarce to be conceived. Every bishop, monastery, and priest, extended their claims over ignorance and superstition, and were sure to find support at Rome for the most extravagant pretensions, provided they took care to divide the spoil with her. All discipline necessarily relaxed, when impunity could thus be purchased; and the monasteries filled with sloth, ignorance, and wealth, could not but exhibit what the records of the time confess, scenes of voluptuousness, ambition, quarrels and impurity.

Yet monkery maintained the highest character for sanctity, and the monasteries were multiplied and filled with inhabitants. It was esteemed the perfection of piety to retire to these seclusions; and in those times of anarchy and confusion, when crimes of the most atrocious nature accumulated, no remedy was so effectual to efface all guilt, and to secure the sinner from all punishment, as to build, or to inhabit them.

Knowledge, profane as well as scriptural, ceased to be cultivated, except by a few in the East, where the Aristotelian philosophy was diligently studied as affording the happiest weapons for controversy; but in the Church, the most miserable

homilies, like those of St. Eloi, and others, learned by heart and repeated memoriter, afforded little instruction; whilst the wretched lives of the saints, stuffed with lying miracles, and the most absurd and superstitious practices, exhibited the most delusive patterns for imitation.

An. 735. In Italy the dim twilight of science threatened the final extinction of all literature. In Britain and Ireland an asylum seems to have been still afforded to the little learning which had survived the former shocks. The venerable Bede and others maintained the honor of the Saxon church. From thence Charlemagne endeavoured to draw assistants to revive the sciences, which he encouraged by his own example, and promoted by his liberality. He founded schools through his dominions, and invited with great rewards the most learned men to his court; placing his own children and those of his nobility, under the care of the most distinguished masters. An. 780. The famous Alcuin, and others, were of this honorable number, and gave hope of blowing up the expiring spark into a flame; but it must be confessed the issue corresponded not with the expectations of the monarch. The mode of teaching, the things taught, the prevailing superstitions, the love of a military life, or the idleness of a convent, prevented any considerable progress: and few of the pupils attained any eminence of science, though the Emperor himself was among the most ardent in the pursuit. In general the grossest ignorance prevailed, and bishops and priests could often

neither read nor write; content to learn by note the formularies of devotion, and the ceremonies attending them, which now became multiplied, and supplied the place of all spiritual worship. As the Emperor's liberality had furnished the ministers of the church with abundance, so his establishment of uniformity lessened their labour, and his happy provision for ignorance in the *homilarium*, that bears his name, rendered study unnecessary: a worthless and idle clergy, little disposed to copy their Monarch's diligence, therefore took their salaries, learnt their lesson by rote, and got through it as speedily as possible.

The sacred relics continued to afford a most profitable source of wealth and veneration, were sought with avidity, and purchased as inestimable treasures. What pilgrims brought from the Holy Land had peculiar value; but an host of saints and martyrs were unkennelled from the charnel houses and cemeteries at home, by multitudes whose nostrils were nearly as acute as those of St. Eloi; and who made much the same advantage of them in their various churches and monasteries, to which they attracted peculiar reverence, and procured the liberal donations of the superstitious. It is impossible to recount the names of these saints, the nature of the relics discovered, and the honours paid to them. The grossest frauds were every where swallowed with avidity by the ignorant and priest-ridden populace.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH—NEW RITES AND CEREMONIES.

THE supreme government of the Church had always hitherto been in the Eastern emperors, without whom, as yet, though the election of a Pontiff might be made, it was not wholly valid till his approbation and consent was obtained. He also appointed to many of the chief sees, and deposed from them almost at his pleasure. The Roman Pontiff longed for an emancipation from all dependance on the Emperor, as he had constantly intrigued, and contended against the patriarch of Constantinople for the supremacy. He often dared to resist the imperial edicts ; and formed, with the bishops under his jurisdiction and influence, a strong party to thwart the Emperor and his patriarch. Nor were anathemas spared, though hitherto not supposed to carry with them all the fearful consequences that quickly began to follow them. At the beginning of this century, the contests and bickerings which had so long been kept on foot, received a peculiar exasperation from two occasions, on which the Greek and Latin churches divided, and sharply disputed for victory.

An. 712. The first regarded the noted controversy *respecting images*. The progress of superstition had multiplied images and pictures in the churches. From a simple memorial, a high veneration grew up for these holy representations of Christ, his mother, the saints and martyrs; some of them acquired a peculiar sanctity; and, like the Pagan images of their deities, were supposed to contain a peculiar inhabitation and presence of the person whom it represented. Bardanes, the Emperor, at the beginning of this century, with the approbation of John, the patriarch of Constantinople, determined to remove a picture of the sixth general council from the Church of St. Sophia; and sent his orders to Rome to exclude all pictures and images from the churches. The Pope, so far from complying with the requisition, ordered other paintings to be set up in St. Peter's Church, and in a council summoned by him, condemned the Emperor and his abettors. The revolution, which quickly ensued, removed Bardanes from the throne; and for awhile the quarrel became suspended. But Leo, called the *Isaurian*, revived the dispute with imperial vigour, An. 726. Shocked at the reproaches of Jews and Mahometans, he resolved to destroy this stumbling block; and issued an edict to remove images of every kind from the churches, and to forbid all worship being paid to them. The spark instantly kindled into an explosion. Fanatic zeal burst all bounds of allegiance, and the superstitious people were instigated to rebellion by those priests and monks, who had for a long while, by this craft procured their gain;

they proclaimed the Emperor an apostate, and the subjects released from all duty to such an enemy to God and his saints. The Roman Pontiffs encouraged this spirit of revolt, and hoped to turn the current in their own favor, and render themselves independent of the imperial edicts. A civil war now raged in the islands of the Archipelago, and in part of Asia; and the Roman and Italian provinces, at the instigation of the Pope and his clergy, rebelled, and murdered or banished the Emperor's officers. LEO, enraged, hastened to revenge the insult, but was foiled and compelled to retire in disgrace. In fury he vented his wrath on those around him, who patronized the image worship. In a council held at Constantinople, he degraded the patriarch Germanus, and substituted Anastasius in his place, commanding all the images to be collected from the churches, and publicly burned; with the severest punishment denounced on those who should be found practising this idolatrous worship. Thus the war was declared and prosecuted with the utmost fury by the invenomed combatants with arms spiritual and temporal, to the great distraction of the empire, the damage of the Christian cause, and the strengthening the hands of the Saracens, less hated by the bishops of Rome than Leo and his image breakers. In these conflicts many of the Grecian provinces in Italy were torn from the Empire.

AN. 741. The son of Leo, CAPRONYMUS, succeeding to the throne, and inheriting his father's antipathy to images, exerted every effort in sup-

pressing the hated worship, and subduing the rebellious pontiffs and their fanatic crew of monks and clergy: and as the way of arms had not succeeded, he summoned a seventh general council at Constantinople, in which images and their worship were solemnly condemned, An. 754. But alas! the decrees were only obeyed so far as the sword of the Emperor had power to force them, and despised by Rome and her partisans: nor were the exemplary punishments inflicted on the monkish preachers of sedition, effectual to extinguish the flame of revolt which continued to blaze forth. His son and successor trod in the same steps; resolved to abolish so great an abomination, he enforced by the most rigorous punishments the edicts of his predecessors. To avenge himself on the Roman pontiffs for their obstinacy, all that church's possessions in Sicily and Calabria were confiscated; and these provinces, with Illyricum, withdrawn from the jurisdiction of Rome to Constantinople; a cause of enmity irreconcilable, and thus a way was paved for the final separation of the churches, and the provocation given to the Roman pontiff to seek a new master, by setting up another Emperor, though in fact intending to make him his subject. This was however only the work of years of cunning and intrigue. For at first the Emperor of the West, Charlemagne, enjoyed all imperial prerogatives; and a council assembled at Rome, decreed to him and his succeessors the right of nominating to the see of Rome; and though they waved this right, and allowed of election as before, their approbation was still necessary to its validity. They also ex-

ercised jurisdiction in many cases of what was called a spiritual nature; enacted laws for, and punished the offences of the clergy, as of others; and received tribute from the churches and monasteries, as from lay fees, unless they had granted them an especial exemption. Charles indeed allowed the Roman church as great increase of power as of territory; but a council was still required to decide important controversies, and this convened by the Emperor; and its edicts were valid only when confirmed by him; so that though the jurisdiction and authority of the Roman pontiffs were greatly increased, they were still subject to the Emperor's control, and they dared not as yet affect that independency to which they were aspiring.

When the cause of the image worship appeared nearly extinct in the East, a revolution of the most horrid kind rendered the Roman pontiff triumphant. A cup of poison ministered by IRENE, the Empress, to her husband, opened a way for her holding the reins of government during the minority of her son; and this auspicious moment was seized by Adrian, the Pope, to league himself with this monster of a woman. A second Nicene council abrogated the former decisions, and sanctioned the worship of images, with anathemas against those who insisted on the worship of *God alone*. AN. 787.

St. Gregory had forbidden "images from being worshipped in any manner whatsoever." Charlemagne and his bishops held a middle path in

this controversy, and supposed pictures and images might be allowed in the churches; but the worship of them was forbidden. Their decision was sent to Adrian, who disapproved of it, and composed a refutation; but in opposition to his infallibility and the Nicene council, this worship was condemned in a new synod, held at Frankfort, of three hundred bishops, convoked by the Emperor. So that hitherto the Church of Rome had neither established her infallibility nor supremacy. AN. 794.

A second, and as fierce a controversy, about *the procession of the Holy Ghost* revived, and rose to an alarming height; and with the former on images, tended to widen the breach, and complete the separation of the Eastern and Western churches: the one adhering as pertinaciously to the words *proceeding from the Father and the Son*, as the other to the rejection of them in the Nicene Creed.

Thus, whilst the Roman pontiffs, struggling for power, pre-eminence, and independence of any superior, artfully seized every occasion of exalting their own importance, religion sunk into obscurity, and all its purity and vitality were lost in senseless rites and pompous ceremonies. No preaching remained, but stupid unmeaning homilies; no public worship but in empty forms; the Lord's supper was made a piece of pageantry; aud private masses of a solitary priest for the souls of the dead, added another lucrative source of sacerdotal pillage, as these required to be well paid for by the relations of the deceased.

The Roman model of worship, with very few exceptions, was by Charlemagne adopted generally through the Western churches, and tended to form one link more in the chain that was to bind them at the feet of the Papal throne.

CHAPTER IV.

SCHISMS AND HERESIES.

THE grand contest between the Eastern and Western churches about images and the procession of the Holy Ghost, with the creation of a new empire, to which the Romish patriarch adhered, made the separation of the churches unavoidable. So many old and new quarrels had rendered the breach irreparable; and the secession of Rome from the Grecian empire completed it; whatever healing efforts were afterwards made to preserve the unity of the Church, they proved abortive.

In the East, the same heresies maintained their ground. The *Monotholites* were favoured by many under the Greek emperors, and the *Nestorians* were cherished and found particular favor from the Saracens. The *Semi-pelagians* continued in Gaul to infect multitudes; and *Arianism* among the barbarous nations who first embraced it, greatly prevailed.

A dispute, originating in Spain, now under Saracenic government, in what sense "Christ was the Son of God? gave an exercise for council upon council, to debate about matters of curious disquisition, and to condemn Felix, a bishop, and

his adherents, who had received the name of *Adoptians*, from their sentiments on the filiation of the Son of God. Terms, ill-defined, furnished matter for the polemics; and the most zealous against the least approach of heresy, were often the most ignorant of all saving truth.

CHAPTER V.

OF THE TRUE CHURCH.

AMIDST the desolations which spread on every side, some faint glimmerings of divine grace still appear. In England and Ireland, though with much superstition, traces of the truth as it is in Jesus, remained. Bede, Alcuin, and others, seem to be men fearing God, and working righteousness.

The Nestorians under the Saracenic government, evidently displayed their zeal for Christianity; and probably maintained some living spark of godliness among them.

AN. 748. Clement, an Irishman, an opponent of the ignorant and fanatic Boniface of Mentz, provoked the archbishop to procure his condemnation at Rome, where probably he ended his days in prison. His crime was, the preferring the Scriptures, and his appeal to them, in opposition to the dictates of the fathers and the decisions of councils. The accusations preferred against him by Boniface were many, and we have no vindication of his own; but we have from the charges themselves abundant cause to conclude, that his sentiments were maliciously misrepresented, and that he was a much sounder apostle of the Catholic faith, than

his insolent persecutor; who at the same time condemned Virgilius as a heretic, for suggesting there were antipodes: but these days of ignorance and superstition afforded like specimens of the insolence and stupidity of Popish legates.

The poor refugees, in the valleys of Piedmont, seem to have been left to themselves; probably too few and contemptible to attract notice, or too far removed from the observation of the proud prelates, who could not have got any thing by persecuting them.

Dispersed throughout the world, a *few* and but a few, probably yet read the Scriptures, embraced the great and precious promises, and amidst all the contentions and fooleries of the day, held fast the truth as it is in Jesus. The disputes about image-worship would necessarily turn the attention of many to the true Object of worship; and the renunciation of all false mediators would naturally lead to him who is the only true mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. His essential deity and glory was an article confidently maintained in the Catholic Church, and neither Felix nor Elipand are accused of denying this.

The few faithful were left indeed to grope their way to heaven through thick darkness and reigning superstition: thinly dispersed in the earth, as the gleaning grapes of the vineyard, when the vintage is done. If we look for a visible church of outward observation, and "a society of faithful "people among whom the word of God was truly

"preached, and the sacraments duly ministered," it will be hard to find such in the Greek or Roman communion, unless among those whom I have mentioned, and whom "the world knew not."

A *few* individuals indeed, of some respectability in the Church, have been produced by the exemplary patience of the learned Milner. He hath, from the heap of chaff, sifted out some grains of evangelical excellence, sufficient to prove that the light of divine truth, however dim, was not utterly extinct. The extracts he produces from names almost unknown, will be read with pleasure; but they are flowers culled from gardens overspread and smothered with weeds. And whoever should be at the pains to translate either of the ancients from whence they are taken, must produce such a farrago of trumpery, such folly, superstition and monkery, as would stamp the whole with contempt, if any thing similar was found in a modern Christian author. And notwithstanding the high encomiums passed on many in these dark ages, I doubt whether the works of any one of them would now find a bookseller to publish, or an individual to read them. Not merely the vast folios of lumber, discourage, but the individual treatises from which the extracts are made, would be tedious and disgusting. Truth engages me to make these observations, whilst every man of God must acknowledge his obligations to the laborious investigation which has brought forth these passages to notice. Respecting some of the characters which Milner has marked with excellence, I am often compelled

to be of a different mind, and can regard here and there an evangelical sentiment but as a jewel of gold in a swine's snout; while his partiality to Rome and her pretensions, never can meet my approbation. *Amicus Plato, sed magis amica Veritas.*

CENTURY IX.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE OUTWARD CHURCH.

WE are descending deeper and deeper still, into the regions of darkness and primæval night: Pursuing the history of a Church without Christianity; and receiving from the toil of investigation little else but disgust and disappointment. Scarcely a feature remains of primitive simplicity and purity; but the advancing depravity of manners, according to the universal testimony, was great, as all the doctrines of truth were distorted by the superstitions, frauds, idolatry aud ignorance of the teachers. However, I shall grope my way through the jarring elements of pride, ambition, sacerdotal rapine and luxuriousness, as well as I can.

The parts professing the Christian name, continued to suffer the severest ravages from without, as well as miseries within; and the conquests of its enemies in one part rather exceed the spread of its dominion in another. The East submitted to the Caliphs; Africa was subdued; they extended their conquests to India and throughout the Persian empire: Sicily was added to Spain and Sardinia; Crete and the islands fell before them; Calabria

they entered and subdued; and Italy was ready to submit to the yoke. Amidst these conquests, and the desolations therewith connected, severe were the sufferings of the vanquished; and in the contests between the conquerors themselves, the Turks in the East attacking alike Saracens and Greeks, the people of the countries before professing Christianity, were the sad victims of both parties; and multitudes to avoid the loss of their property, secured their possessions and liberty by adopting the religion of their masters.

AN. 832—900. From the northern hive a fresh swarm of piratical plunderers, Danes or Normans, infested the coasts of Germany, Britain, Gaul, Spain, and even penetrated into the heart of Italy, every where carrying fire and sword, plunder, and captivity; and if repulsed in one part, landing and ravaging another. And where the fertility of the country invited, and their force was sufficient to retain possession, in the feeble state of many countries, there they erected principalities; and Europe suffered incredible misery from their long and repeated devastations. The little remaining traces of knowledge, they extinguished; and often vented their peculiar rage on the religious communities and churches, as affording the richest booty.

On the other hand attempts were made to extend the knowledge of what was called Christianity, in Jutland and Cimbria, among the Danes and Swedes. The son of Charlemagne imitated his sire in spreading religion by his arms; and the famous Ansgar, with his missionary labourers, seconded his opera-

tions, and was rewarded with the Archbishopric of Hamburgh, and the patriarchate of all the North. An. 831.

An. 850. Methodius and Cyril, two Greek monks, penetrated through Mæsia and Bulgaria, as far as Bohemia and Moravia; and without the arm of power seem to have been successful missionaries. From them the present Moravian Church traces its descent; though men of a superior spirit to their founders, yet these from the beginning, resisted the jurisdiction of the Roman pontiffs, and contended with success for their own rites and ceremonies, sufficiently indeed superstitious.

An. 867. The Russians and Sclavonians received also from Constantinople a company of missionaries, who succeeded in sowing the seeds of Christianity among them, though the progress was not probably great. And it must be owned, that all these converts in general were as little instructed in the true principles of Christian doctrine as examples of Christian practice. A superficial profession admitted them to baptism, often under the sword of the conqueror, to please their chieftains, or to secure some advantage: and the missionaries themselves displayed the first efforts of their zeal to gain subjects to the see of Rome, rather than proselytes to true religion: indulged them in their own superstitious practices, and only gave them a Christian name and form: easily satisfied with the slightest conformity to the profession and formalities of the reigning system of Christianity; so that the differ-

ence between the Pagan before, and the Christian convert afterwards, respecting all that deserves that name, was scarcely perceptible.

The Nestorians continued their efforts among the Tartars, and spread the knowledge of Christianity far into the wilds of Scythia: but the accounts of their progress is very indistinct.

On the whole, though many attempts were made, without much attention to the most proper and apostolic means to spread Christianity among the northern savage nations, the cause rather declined; and the Saracens, Othmans and Normans, gained more than the missionaries, whether by the sword or persuasion: so that the outward state of the Church appears equally calamitous and declining.

CHAPTER II.

INTERNAL STATE OF THE CHURCH.

THOUGH in the East a much more considerable share of literature was maintained than in the West, the progress of ignorance was abundantly deplorable. The chief use made of science, was in useless and unprofitable disputes, to which Aristotle most especially contributed, and was therefore studied with particular attention. The knowledge of divine truth, and of the Scriptures, was lost in fanciful allegory and hidden senses, discoverable only by fanatic imagination. The monks multiplied and maintained their reputation for sanctity. The contentions for power, and particularly for the sees of Rome and Constantinople, were bitter, and often bloody. The change of Emperors filled the East with tumult; and the changes of patriarchs were more common, as the Emperors exercised their power in deposing and raising such as they pleased. The clergy, whose only object seemed to be the enriching and exalting the sacerdotal order, abandoned themselves to the most shameful licentiousness: whoever reads Agobard, and the canons passed for reformation of manners, must be shocked to observe the offences committed. Thus, though the Mahomedans were spreading over Asia, and approaching with gigantic

strides the Thracian Bosphorus, the decay of all religion loosened the bands of society, and neither danger nor misery led men to repentance. The Christian Church exhibited only a putrid carcase ready for the eagles to prey upon. Vast provinces were utterly separated from the dominion of the Grecian Emperors, Egpyt, Africa, Syria, Arabia, great part of Asia, all fallen under the Saracenic yoke, and filled with apostates to Mahomedism.

In the West, religion bore an aspect as hideous, and ignorance more profound prevailed. As, to enrich the Church was the most essential act of piety, and the surest way to cancel all crimes, and open the gates of purgatory and of heaven, the superstitious, from the highest to the lowest, laboured to commute for their sins, and to share their wealth and possessions with their clerical mediators: and these so ignorant, they could scarcely read the offices of devotion; and so profligate, that their examples were still more fatal to the flock; whilst the idea that they held the keys of paradise, made the senseless multitude look up to them with a veneration approaching to adoration. All things conspired to destroy every principle of Christian grace: many bishops, by their tenures became feudal barons, were called into the field with their military tenants; lived in all the luxury and criminal indulgences of courts and camps; and were the same men in the rochet, as in the coat of mail. Their dioceses and clergy neglected, followed their pernicious examples, to which the private patrons of ecclesiastical preferments contributed by bestow-

ing their benefices on priests like themselves, from whom they should be subject to no rebuke for their crimes, and obtain an easier absolution, as they shared their rapine, luxury, sports and drunkenness.

The heads of the Church at Rome still exceeded in corruption the inferior members; uniformly pursuing the one object of increasing their power, extending their jurisdiction, and drawing to themselves all the wealth they could collect from the most distant provinces by every means, they rose fast to that altitude of station in the Western world, where for a long while enthroned in the temple of God, they shewed themselves as God, dictating to a prostrate world. Though some of these pontiffs were men of letters and decent, multitudes of them (for the succession was rapid) were marked with the most atrocious crimes, as may be seen in every history of the day; and not an individual displayed a single trace of the mind of Christ, or his Spirit, though they assumed the character of his vicar or vicegerent. Whether one of them was a woman in disguise, hardly deserves the noise which has been raised about it. AN. 855.

Careful to improve every opportunity of rising to pre-eminence, they employed all their wealth and influence. Unable wholly to emancipate themselves from imperial dominion, under those Emperors of the West, who held the reins of goverment with a vigorous grasp, they failed not to make continual encroachments on the feeble, and to endeavor to usurp dominion over those to whom they were but subjects. As the successors of Charle-

magne declined in power and authority, the Popes rose in their pretensions; and when civil wars broke out among competitors for the empire, they failed not to improve the opportunity of procuring fresh privileges, by casting their weight into the scale, which would make it preponderate, till they assumed the right of bestowing the imperial crown; and this too purchased by presents immense, as well as promises of the most filial obedience, AN. 876. Confusion upon confusion embroiling the Western Empire, the multitude of candidates who struggled for the imperial throne, bid against each other at Rome for the papal suffrage and unction, which were procured by the richest gifts, and the most abject concessions.

The princes thus raised by Romish influence contributed all their power to establish the pontiff's dominion; and as their claims were boundless, they now endeavoured to support their universal omnipotence in every thing relative to religion. They denied even to *councils* the power of determining any matter of doctrine or discipline, but with their consent and approbation. The whole body of prelacy was subjugated to them, as alone deriving their authority from the pontiffs of Rome, the successors of Peter, the representative of Christ, and the only visible head of his church upon earth. And though these unscriptural pretensions roused many a defendant of the prelatical order against such insolent usurpations, the power and intrigues of the Roman see prevailed, aided by the grossest forgeries of pretended decretals and councils,

which men were too ignorant then to detect, or too feeble to resist, AN. 814. In vain the French bishops remonstrated, and wished to support their expiring liberties. The perseverance, power and craft of the pontiffs, especially of Nicholas the First, triumphed over all opposition: and those who could not be convinced, were at least compelled to be silent. Thus by a subjugation of the ministers of Christianity in every region to a foreign pontiff, a great step was still gained to claims of universal rule, and monarchs as well as people, bowed down to pontifical dominion.

To this the legions of monks also, universally dispersed, contributed their utmost powers. They were the devoted partisans of the Roman see; and grown into such credit, as well as multiplied in number, that kings and princes renounced the world to retire to monasteries, and end their days in these holy solitudes, as the sure mode of redeeming their souls from all former abominations: and such was the folly and superstition of the times, that they who had not the heart to renounce their dignities and grandeur, when living, clothed themselves in the monk's cowl when dying, in hope of thus associating themselves to some share of the merit of that holy fraternity. These all strengthened the hands, and supported the most extravagant claims of Rome, nor did the profligacy of their lives seem to diminish the veneration of the vulgar for the order.

AN. 817. New ranks of canons and canonesses, (the first women convents,) were also added to the

sacred corps of celibataries, to strengthen the bands of religion, and set a better example to the monks, who had so grievously degenerated from their professed *order*; and which the second Benedict, with high reputation to himself, attempted to revive. His success was of no long duration. The disorder was incorrigible, where abundance of wealth, and abundance of corruption, opened the flood-gates of impurity and indulgence. AN. 821.

The wretched declension of all religion under such guides, may easily be conceived. The zealous attempts of Charlemagne and his son, to produce some beneficial change by the promotion of literature, and the erection of seminaries, failed of the hoped for effect, whether through the infelicity of the times, the indolence of the pupils, or the improper method of tuition. Thus, though a few men, such as Scotus, Godeschalcus and Bertramn, attempted to dispel the ignoranee of their cotemporaries, the disease was inveterate, and hardly a symptom remained of the benefit of their labours after their decease. The clergy, ignorant themselves, and the patrons of ignorance, had no desire the people should be instructed. The grosser the darkness that enveloped their superstitious minds, the easier dupes they were to their sacerdotal directors.

But though all knowledge, christian or scientific, was at the lowest ebb, the veneration for saints was more profound than ever; and the greatest ingenuity of invention was employed in

raising up a host of new names ; many of them, never till then heard of, whose wondrous lives afforded scope for the most outrageous fictions, which were as credulously received, as impudently invented. Each contended for the honour of their adopted patron, and exhausted their imaginations in adorning them with every possible perfection, and lying miracles ; and so fast were they multiplied, that it became necessary to prevent the licentiousnes of superstition from overstocking the world with more patron saints than there were clients, by restricting the canonization first to provincial councils, and then to the Roman see itself; which contrived to turn this favor to good account, and to be well paid for their sanction.

The precious relics sought after with such avidity, could not fail to be discovered by such interested investigators; and as the most celebrated would attract the most liberal donations, it is impossible to recount the miracles wrought, the devils dispossessed, the diseases of all kinds removed, by these powerful operators. Each vied with their fellows in the transcendent efficacy of their own relics; monastery with monastery, church with church, and priest with priest, trying who could out-lie the other, and attract the greatest concourse of deluded votaries. The farther fetched the relics, the more revered, especially if names of apostles and primitive martyrs were affixed to them, and the more numerous and solemnly attested the miracles, and cures performed by them, the higher rose the veneration.

The scriptures of truth were buried under the load of fathers, controversialists, and mystics; and more eager to bite and devour one another, than to unite their forces against the common enemies of the faith, the churches of the East and West continued to worry each other about image worship, the procession of the spirit, and the encroachments of jurisdiction. Ignorance and idolatry at last completely triumphed. In the East and West it became established by law.

An. 879. A new source of contention now arose about the Eucharist, and in *what manner* the body and blood of Christ were present in that sacrament. Superstitious and unscriptural notions had long been gaining ground. A monk, named Paschasius, (for in convents these follies chiefly were invented) pretended that after consecration, *the form* of the elements only remained, and *the same body*, born of the Virgin, crucified on Calvary, and raised from the dead, was really and locally present. This was opposed by Bertramn, and yet more explicitly by Scotus, who argued that the bread and wine were only *signs* and *symbols* of the *absent* body of the Lord. The controversy has since swollen into a bulk, that presents a fearful monument of human folly. An. 851.

An. 847. A more important one was renewed by *Godeschalcus*, respecting the doctrines of predestination and grace. He was a monk of Orbais, in France, where pelagianism was from the beginning deeply rooted. Zealous for the evangelical doctrines, now debased with every alloy, and de-

sirous of reviving the knowledge of the grace of God in truth, he laboured assiduously, under the patronage of Eberald, one of the first nobles in the court of the Emperor Lothaire. He was heard with deep seriousness and attention; even the bishop of Verona was his auditor; and Remi, archbishop of Lyons; Prudentius, bishop of Troyes; the famous Ratramn, a monk of Corby; Lupus, abbot of Ferrieres, and other men of eminence, warmly embraced his opinions. A flame was kindled by his preaching; and his popularity awakened the envy and enmity of Maurus, archbishop of Mentz, before whom he was accused of heresy, and condemned in a council held in that city. An. 848. For punishment he was sent to Hincmar, his diocesan, archbishop of Rheims, who had ordained him. Hincmar was in league with his brother, the bishop of Mentz, and equally the enemy of this pretended disturber of the Church's peace, and of his person. With him the ablest arguments and unimpeached integrity of Godeschalcus weighed not a hair. In a council at Quiercy, his condemnation was confirmed with every insult and aggravated injustice. An. 849. In vain he maintained the truth of his opinions from Augustin, with evidence it was impossible to contradict or deny; and from the Scripture, which his adversaries less respected as authority. It was resolved to punish and silence him. The brutish prelate, the less able he was to answer his arguments or impeach his fidelity, the more exasperated, without shame resolved to employ the power with which he was invested. He degraded him

from the sacerdotal character, exposed him to the public by a severe corporal punishment; and after whipping him till he was covered with a gore of blood and near expiring, he cast him into a miserable dungeon, where after years of suffering, he died a martyr for the truths which no torments could engage him to forsake; though the force of them had compelled him to burn with his own hands the justification of his opinions, which he had presented to the council at Mentz. Into the same fire *he* had probably been cast himself, if he had obstinately refused this sacrifice. But his spirit unbroken with ill usage, long maintained in the house of his prison the same opinions for which he suffered; and his latest breath solemnly attested the divine authority of the truth, which living he had defended, and when dying supported him through all his sufferings. Who can read Church History without horror of the abuses of prelatical power? and this most commonly exercised against the most faithful witnesses, for those very evangelical truths, in pretended support of which these men held their dignities.

But the sufferings of the martyr, as is usually the case, produced effects more powerful probably than his preaching. His doctrines were canvassed; his defences read; the cruelty of his enemies awakened compassion, and the divine truth, for which he suffered, found able advocates in the eminent ecclesiastics above mentioned, and many others, who condemned the injustice with which Godeschalcus had been treated, and the unchristian severity of

the punishments inflicted on him ; maintaining the opinions which he had promulged as the doctrine of the Church, as that of the Scriptures, and of the best men in every preceding age; and defying their enemies to confute their reasonings, or contradict the evidence which they produced. But the party of Hincmar and his associates, was, as is the case in general where the truths of vital godliness are the subject of contest, far superior: they had the secular arm, and the prelatical corps on their side ; and Christ and his cause, when it comes before such men, will be sure to meet condemnation. The decrees of the former councils were confirmed, and poor Godeschalcus and his doctrine received a third anathema.

But his Gallic friends resolved not to submit to this imperious prelate and his unjust decrees. An. 855. A body of bishops, under the archbishop of Lyons, assembled at Valence in Dauphiny, vindicated the condemned monk and his doctrine ; and fourteen provinces assembled at Langres, concurred in the same opinion, and pronounced the eulogium of the faithful witness, who had now expired in prison under the inhuman Hincmar. An. 869.

This contest ended not with the men of that day, but to our own remains in its full vigour, and will probably continue to the end of time. The unhumbled, the unawakened, the pharisaical, the proud, who entertain high imaginations of the human powers, and the reasonings of fallen man, must as inveterately oppose the doctrines of grace

now, as they did of old; and whenever power is in the hands of oppressors, and the spirit of the times admits their openly expressing the enmity of their hearts, the same victims to prelatical tyranny will be found as Godeschalcus.

The truths which Godeschalcus maintained, have since found most able defenders in the famed Maguin, and a host of others, who have repelled the false conclusions their adversaries pretended to draw from his premises; and have vindicated the God of all grace from the charges which the ignorant have presumed to cast upon him, as inferences which they suppose deducible from the predestinarian principles. The one book of Edwards, on the Freedom of the Human Will, challenges all the sophistry of unhumbled reason to answer its arguments.

Mosheim calls this an intricate and incomprehensible subject, where to be silent is the truest wisdom; and so would evade the entering on the most interesting truths of God's revealed word. To the sinner, conscious of his guilt, misery and helplessness, the riches of the grace which is in Jesus Christ, will be neither a subject intricate nor incomprehensible; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, in all its happy and saving effects, will be found the point of highest wisdom; but it is what the wisdom of man never taught, nor all his proud reasonings ever led to. "The natural man receiveth not the things which "be of the Spirit of God, neither can he know "them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Happily the Lord in every age, though they were but few comparatively, taught some the grace of God, which bringeth salvation; and to this day a generation, according to the election of grace, can say, "wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." We are not indeed bound to vindicate Godeschalcus, or any man, in every position they may have laid down, or in every conclusion they have drawn, or rather, which their adversaries have drawn for them: it is sufficient, that "the foundation of God standeth sure; the Lord knoweth those that are his:" whilst each individual who holds the grace of God in truth, feels his obligation to make his own calling and election sure.

As the doctrine of the Trinity hath a near connection with that of predestination and grace, the same Hincmar as bitterly condemned his adversary for the use of that address,—"O God, triune, yet one, we pray," &c. This he termed *Tritheism*, and condemned as impious heresy. The poor monk from his prison defended the address; which the Benedictines also, in opposition to Hincmar, maintained; and in defiance of his anathemas, the form was continued in the churches, and the truth so far prevailed.

The ridiculous controversy about the birth of Christ, and the manner in which his Virgin mother bore him, was suited to the ignorance, folly and superstition of the times. The worship of this woman had proceeded already to a wondrous height, and she was beginning to be enthroned

Regina Cœli, Queen of Heaven, throughout the Christian world. As she was supposed to have some peculiar interest in, and authority over the son of her womb, she therefore came in for a large share of monkish devotion and popular adoration.

AN. 858. The bitter quarrels and anathemas mutually hurled from Constantinople against Rome, and from Rome against Constantinople, had for their pretence, the deposition, whether just or unjust, of the patriarch Ignatius, whom the Roman pontiff espoused. The real cause was the rivalry, ambition, and lust of power in the sees: Rome being glad to seize every occasion to extend her jurisdiction, to gratify her covetousness, and establish her pre-eminence; but fearful and fatal as these long and wretched contests were to the real interests of religion, the particulars would be now as little entertaining as profitable. The breach of the churches widened: the curses of the West rested on the East, and the curses of the East rested on the West; and if this had been all the harm done, it would have been like the ridiculous battle of children's pop guns; but *hæ nugæ ad seria ducunt*, the consequences of these contentions weakened both the East and West, the people were the victims of the wickedness and wrath of their rulers, and the enemies of the Church triumphed in her divisions and contentions.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE GOVERNMENT, RITES, CEREMONIES, AND HERESIES OF THE CHURCH.

THE government of the Church was now approaching to despotic, especially in the Western world. The Church of Rome attempted to concentrate the whole ecclesiastical power in herself; to which the weakness and divisions of the empire, the craft and intrigues of a succession of wicked pontiffs, and the zeal of the monkish order, greatly contributed.

The more rites and ceremonies, the more multiplied must be the ministers of the sanctuary, and the more numerous the sacerdotal host, who looked to Rome as the centre of expectation, maintained her power, and were countenanced in all their superstitions. The greatest writers were now *wisely* and *piously* employed in explaining the profound mysteries contained in all the farrago of forms and ceremonies, which had overwhelmed the devotion of the Christian world. We blush at the recital of the follies practised, as at the ridiculous reasons given for them; but to the credulous multitude they acquired a higher veneration, under the sanction and explanations of Scotus, Remigius, Amalarius, and others, whose eminence in wisdom and literature stamped the highest authority on these fooleries.

As new saints multiplied, invention was racked to find new offices and rites appropriate to each. And as every one vied in zeal for their peculiar patrons, altars, images, vestments, processions, and masses, accumulated. The account is the most degrading history of human imbecility.

And what added to the infelicity of these inventions, new ceremonies were enacted and introduced into *civil life*, and made the criteria of virtue and innocence. Thus the different ordeals by fire, water, and the cross, now came into practice: and that dreadful and most anti-christian appeal to God by single combat,—the probable origin of the modern duel: and horrible to tell, the pope and clergy sanctified all these abuses by the introduction of the most sacred solemnities on the occasion, even to the celebration of the holy sacrament, to add the greater dignity to these delusions. Their own gain, interest, and advantage were sure not to be forgotten on these occasions.

Heresy continued to sharpen the edge of controversy. The former ones still subsisted, though contests of other kinds rather diverted the attention from them. The Nestorians, fostered under the Saracenic wing, multiplied in Egypt, Persia, and wherever the Mahomedan power prevailed; so that their churches in these countries were by far the most numerous. But another sect, the *Paulicians*, whose tenets have been before described, after alternate persecution and toleration, maintained

their ground, and awakened the jealousy and enmity of the Grecian prelates and their Emperor: which broke out in the most bloody and savage persecutions to reduce them to conformity with the established Church. Driven to despair by their oppressors, and provoked by their cruelty to self-defence, sure of death if they refused to abandon their principles, and having nothing more to fear in the maintainance of them, they resolved to find safety in rebellion; and after many a furious conflict with their enemies, in which they often retaliated upon their persecutors the cruelties which they had inflicted, they retired into the dominions of the Saracens, and found protection under the crescent from the fury of those who pretended to fight under the cross.

An. 845. An interval of peace invited them back to their former habitations in Armenia, when that wicked and furious Theodora, who governed during the minority of her son, fell upon them with implacable fury, and compelled them, after the confiscation of a hundred thousand families, and the most barbarous murders and torments inflicted on the captives, to seek refuge again under the Mahomedan government. Those who escaped were received by the Saracens with great cordiality, and settled in the frontier city of Tibrica, from whence they issued forth on the adjacent Grecian provinces and wasting them with fire and sword, avenged as men, not as Christians, the inhuman murders of of their brethren.

To draw the line of comparison between the contenders, respecting their principles or practice, is difficult, as we have all our materials from one party, and that of the persecutors; yet two things are evident, that they would have been faithful subjects and strengthened the hands of government, had they been permitted to live in peace; and I cannot call that rebellion, where men driven to the last extremities have no alternative but death, or profession of what they regard as false religion. Whatever cendemnable excesses follow, at the door of the oppressors and persecutors will the guilt and blood be laid.

As to the points of heresy laid to their charge, if we possessed their own vindication, we should hear probably a different account from the gross errors imputed to them. Of this we are sure, even from the acknowledgments of their enemies, that (with exception to the Epistles of St. Peter, which it is said they rejected; for what reasons, or whether true, we are in the dark) they zealously inculcated the authority of the scriptures of the New Testament, and sharply condemned the Grecian priests, for retaining them from the people. They renounced also all proud distinctions, and reduced their pastors to a more primitive equality; of all crimes the greatest in the eyes of prelatical arrogance: and instead of worshipping the Virgin Mary, and the wood of the cross, they treated with contempt those false mediums of idolatry, and only adored the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he had sent. Probably in many points they may

have been erroneous; but no true Protestant, or true Christian, can hesitate a moment in the decision, with whom the most dangerous errors and heresies were found, and whether Greeks or Paulicians held the most essential truths of the faith of Christ.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TRUE CHURCH.

AFFLICTED with these miserable scenes, I look around for the true Church of the redeemed, whose names are written in Heaven. And I feel no reluctance to go into the prison of Godeschalcus, and to the few that espoused his cause, and the truths for which he suffered, for my brethern in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. I should visit also the valleys of Piedmont and Pais de Vaud, and the adjacent regions of the Gallic dominion; and hope to find in the sequestered village the faithful pastor, and the humble flock, contaminated perhaps with some of the prevailing superstitions, but maintaining the truth as it is in Jesus, and possessing the life of God in their souls. One character of distinguished eminence, whose diocese extended over Piedmont, Claudius, bishop of Turin, made a resolute stand against many of the abominations of the Roman Pontiffs. His writings contain more evangelical truth than perhaps any other of that day; and the vilest abuse and opposition which he received from Rome and her partisans, speak the fidelity with which he supported the doctrines which he believed. To him some suppose the Waldenses are chiefly indebted for the purity of the Gospel, of

which they afterwards became such faithful witnesses; and if, as is asserted, their origin was more ancient, they could not but flourish and be encouraged under his administration. AN. 820.

The churches in Bohemia and Moravia, planted by Cyril, subsisted, renouncing the jurisdiction of Rome, and worshipping God, if not without superstitious rites, yet more in spirit and in truth than others. Indeed, those most removed from the scenes of pride, contention, wealth, and ambition, would probably be most preserved from evil, by their poverty and seclusion from the world.

I should expect to find in Britain a race to serve him, and the Cambrian mountains not destitute of the traces of primitive religion. Thither many Christians had retired from the ravages of the Danes. And I should hope when the great Alfred recovered the kingdom, restored order, and erected the University of Oxford, to revive religious knowledge and literature, fallen into the deepest decay, some sparks of truth still survived amidst the reign of ignorance and superstition. AN. 872.

The famous Ansgar manifested in his missionary zeal, the flame that burned in his own bosom, and those of his Anglo-Saxon associates. And there is every reason to conclude, that among his numerous converts, some real Christians would be found.

AN. 827. Angilbertus, Bishop of Milan, resolutely resisted the papal claims. Whether he approved of the things truly excellent is more dubious.

The Nestorians appear not to have declined in zeal; and under a liberal toleration, without royal revenues, to have maintained a greater portion of the gospel purity than their fellow Christians, who excommunicated them.

Nor can I doubt, but among the persecuted Paulicians and their pastors, men of real Christian simplicity would be found. The persecuted and the suffering professors of Christianity, to every man who knows its real nature, have many presumptive evidences in their favour.

But in the East and in the West the scriptures were still open to the inspection of all. And amidst the scandalous contentions that made the men of that day distinguished, piety and purity were not utterly lost in the world: some real Christians were found in the retirement of private life, or inferior stations in the Church; nor will I utterly exclude a solitary here and there, even in monastic seclusion, who loved and served a pardoning God, perhaps with much darkness of view or conformity to established superstitions, but yet with sincerity and truth. The triumphant demand of an outward visible Church will be despised by every man who is acquainted in his own soul with the nature of true Christianity.

CENTURY X.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE STATE OF THE OUTWARD CHURCH.

THE Ottoman power prevailing over the Saracenic in the East, the conquerors adopted the religion of the vanquished, and continued their desolations over the remnant of Christianity which subsisted in their dominions. Oppression and persuasion, the alternative of loss of all things, or a prosperous civil establishment, prevailed; and their converts were multiplied equal to their conquests.

AN. 812—912. For a while, the barbarous Normans continued their devastations, but becoming fixed in France, and more humanized, they at last received the Christianity then taught, and a Gallic Queen engaged the famous Rollo to submit to baptism, and his warriors followed his example.

AN. 965. A like event produced a similar effect in Poland, where a daughter of the Duke of Bohemia persuaded her uxorius husband to adopt her religion as his own; and to recommend it to his subjects. A host of monkish missionaries rushed into the battle under the royal patronage, but as they were ignorant of the language, and not very

deeply furnished with the weapons of conviction, the impatient Queen engaged her spouse to take a shorter way, and compel his reluctant subjects to bow their necks to the episcopal yoke, and receive baptism from the bishops and archbishops, and the host of clergy, which issued from the court into the provinces. The nature of such conversions we deplore, whilst we record them.

An. 987. As if this was to be the age of female missionaries, a third grand conversion of a more famed empire followed the marriage of the sister of the Grecian Emperor with the Russian Duke of Wlodomir. The Christianity which had been preached in the former century, had produced in Russia very little effects of a permanent nature. The Duke and his subjects were still pagan. Ann persuaded her husband Wlodomir, who took the baptismal name of Basilius, to embrace Christianity. His subjects followed the example of their sovereign, and became generally, in their own account at least, true believers. The Duke and Duchess, who lie at Kiovia, stand high in the order of canonised Russians; and receive the worship due to such eminent saints to this day. Though it must be acknowledged the brutal character of Basilius favored nothing of beatification.

Hungary, which had before received some glimmerings of Christianity, became more enlightened. To this nothing contributed so powerfully as the marriage of Sarolta with Geysa the Hungarian

monarch. She was the daughter of Gylas, a barbarian chieftan, who having been baptised at Constantinople had established the profession of Christianity on the banks of the Danube. In their son's reign the work became general; churches and bishoprics were every where erected, and conversion to nominal Christianity at least, was universal through the kingdom. AN. 950 to 1000.

AN. 948. Harold of Denmark, conquered rather by the sword of Otho than the arguments of Poppon, and his lying miracles, consented with his subjects to become Christians, that they might possess their independence as a nation. His son Sueno apostatized; but adversity brought him back to the Christian profession, and Providence restoring him to his kingdom, he became a zealous advocate for Christianity.

Norway, after long resistance to her monarchs, in rejecting the Christian profession, at last submitted to the strong arm of Olaus; who finding all other methods ineffectual, visited his provinces with an army capable of commanding obedience, and with apostles to baptise the multitude, who were driven to the font, and received the sign of the Cross. The English missionaries were the active instruments, and their zeal carried them to the Orkney islands, to Iceland, and even to Greenland, where they planted the standard of the Cross.

AN. 936—948. No man distinguished himself in zeal for Christianity beyond Otho, surnamed the *Great*, Emperor of Germany. To secure the obe-

dience of the Germans to the faith, who were yet half pagan, he established a variety of bishoprics, which he richly endowed. He supported with all his influence the prelates, whom he placed in these different sees: and erecting schools in various parts of his dominions, he beheld a general submission to his will, and the professsion of the Christian religion throughout his dominions. His bounty fell in showers on churches and monasteries, in which the Empress abundantly seconded his liberalities; and if the clergy did not do their duty, it was not for want of being well paid for it. Some have justly doubted, whether this superstitious profusion did not more harm than good: but when a monarch had been taught that these things were the most effectual means for *the redemption of his soul*, we shall the less wonder at his munificence, though we may pity his ignorance and superstition.

An. 999. And now first the tocsin of holy war was sounded by Sylvester against the Saracens, which however ineffectual to waken up the dormant zeal, and kindle the enthusiasm of that generation, prepared the way for the crusaders in the next.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE INTERNAL STATE OF THE CHURCH.

THE progress of learning in the East had not utterly ceased, and one of the Emperors, Constantine Porphyrogeneta, AN. 911, gave a noble example to his subjects, if they could have been recovered to the love of science and literature: but the time was past. A dissolute clergy, wallowing in wealth, despised the toils of laborious investigation, and rather chose, enthroned in ignorance, to maintain dominion over the enslaved consciences of men. Even imperial patronage produced no material alteration, and the very helps which he afforded, by causing extracts to be made from the most valuable authors, brought the originals themselves into neglect.

Happily the Saracens continued to advance rapidly in the cultivation of all the sciences, to which, under Abdallah, the celebrated Caliph of Babylon and Egypt, in the last century they had addicted themselves. In the East, the famous schools of Bagdad and Bassora flourished, and knowledge was propagated by them through Africa into Spain, where the mathematics, philosophy, physic, and the muses flourished, as no where else in Europe: thither all the Christians resorted, who

sought improvement, and wished to emancipate themselves from the ignorance which prevailed.

Though all knowledge was not quite extinct in the West, the number of those who had the least pretensions to learning was astonishingly small; and these had chiefly derived it from the Saracenic schools; for the science cultivated in the Christian seminaries under monkish tuition, was trivial and puerile in the highest measure, and served only to foster the prevailing superstitions. Gerbert, a native of France, at the close of the century, being elected Pope under the name of Sylvester II. endeavored to rouse the expiring spark into a flame. He had been a pupil at Cordoua, and instructed in the various branches of science, and owed to his Arabian tutors a considerable knowledge of the mathematics, for those days. He published a little elementary treatise to make plain the first lines of geometry. But in that superstitious age the very diagrams he drew, exposed him to the charge of being a magician, and, though a Pope, he was accused of dealing with the Devil.

The profligacy and ignorance of the clergy must in any other state of things have rendered them despicable and detested, but in that day the veneration for their sacred character was so established, and the people such dupes to their pious frauds and pretensions, that the grossest abominations in the highest order of prelates passed off without revolting. It is said of Theophylact, the Grecian patriarch, that his stud of two thousand horses was fed with grapes and pistacho nuts, steeped in the most

exquisite wines: and that news being brought him of a favourite mare having foaled, as he was celebrating high mass on Holy Thursday, he left the ceremony unfinished to run to the stable, and caress his darling and her progeny, and then returned to finish the service. To support these unclerical sports of dogs and horses, and all their expensive apparatus, he sold all ecclesiastical benefices in his disposal; a traffic too common in those days.

His brethren at Rome, during this century, kept him well in countenance; where a succession of the most wretched, profligate, avaricious, and abandoned of mankind, filled the holy see; whose histories are a disgrace, not only to the Christian name, but to human nature. I only mention *John* X. Archbishop of Ravenna, raised to the see by Theodora, his mother in law, (An. 914.) with whom he continued an incestuous intercourse: murdered by Marozia, who shortly after filled the papal chair with her own bastard, *John* XI. the fruit of adultery with Sergius III. An. 931. Degraded for his crimes, and renewing his contests with the Emperor, he died miserably. The election of his successor, Otho disapproved, dethroned him, and carried him away captive, where he expired in exile, An. 963. It would be tedious to follow the succession of such men, as well as useless; what the state of religion must be in the world, under their government, may be more easily supposed than described.

Yet the grandeur and exaltation of the see was never forgotten, and every Pope failed not to seize

the favourable moment to attach all power to the Church, and to extend their pretensions over Kings and Emperors as well as their own clergy. Their parasites and partisans maintained their right of dominion universally, and that all episcopal authority, though divine in its original, could only be conveyed through St. Peter and his successors in the papal chair.

To compensate for what they lost by these exorbitant claims, the greater ecclesiastics endeavoured to enlarge the bounds of their authority; to emancipate themselves and their clergy from all secular jurisdiction, and to claim the civil as well as ecclesiastical authority in the cities where they dwelt, and the dioceses over which they presided. In many of which, the Kings and Emperors connived at their encroachments, reverencing their character, and perhaps politically presuming upon their influence with the people, to establish their own more peaceable dominion, preferring temporary prelates to hereditary ambitious nobles.

Men living in luxury of every kind, and professing celibacy, could not but sink into the depth of impurity; and they who *might not* have wives, maintained a more expensive haram of mistresses: for these the treasures of the Church were squandered, and no difficulty made of purchasing lucrative ecclesiastical offices, or selling those at their disposal, to supply the cravings of lewdness and extravagance.

Deplorable indeed are the records of the times; and the ecclesiastics the examples of every abomination. Odo, a monk of Clugni, and afterwards abbot, endeavoured to restore the monastic discipline? and raised his own reputation for sanctity to the highest pitch of eminence: but if his reformation bore any similitude to his works, which remain, stuffed with the most puerile observances and debasing superstitions, we shall not augur highly of the reformer or the reformed.

With regard to all scriptural criticism or attempt to diffuse the knowledge of the Divine oracles, such works of that age as I have ever heard mentioned, were, I believe, never once consulted by any man of the present day on any subject of sacred literature. The conflicts of St. Dunstan with the Devil; and Simeon the patriarch's lives of the saints, afford a mortifying specimen of the spirit of the times. An. 960. The great and precious promises of the word of God were all sunk into oblivion; and even divine worship turned from the true Jehovah to numberless new mediators and saints, many of them the creative produce of monkish imagination. No man thought of addressing God without having secured some patron saint, lighted up some candles before a favourite image, or bribed the Virgin Mary to support him by some present or oblation.

But though the clergy had little theological science, they were well trained in all the tricks of priestcraft; and knew how to make the fire of pur-

gatory a crucible of gold, to melt down the riches of the laity. From the torments of this fearful purification, enforced by all the most terrific oratory, men were glad to redeem themselves, or abridge their sufferings for a thousand years, or so, at as good a rate as they could purchase the necessary masses, or procure the superabundant merit of some eminent saint.

Nor was it a small addition to this sacerdotal engine of wealth and influence, as this century advanced, to apply the book of Revelations, as foretelling the approach of Anti-christ and of the general judgment ready to commence at the expiration of the first thousand years. As all sublunary possessions could be then of little avail, the clergy failed not to improve the moment of expectation; and multitudes to secure some merit against that awful time, bequeathed all their estates and wealth to the Church and her ministers, expressly assigning the reason, "appropinquante mundi termino," *the end of all things being at hand.* And so far had this delusion spread, that the noblest edifices were suffered to run to decay and tumble down, because repairs would so soon be useless. Many conveyed their lands and property, and with them subjugated their persons to the ministers of religion and the monasteries, hoping greater favor from Christ on account of this relation to him; whilst others marched off for Palestine, leaving all behind them for holy uses, expecting Christ's descent there, and a more favorable reception from

him, as the reward of their laborious pilgrimage to Jerusalem. If the evidences did not remain of such egregious folly, they would hardly be credited.

The saints continued to replenish the earth with objects of devotion. A very small measure of extraordinary austerity and strictness, procured for the living the title, and at their death the worship; but the long departed saints afforded a more abundant harvest. Not that it seemed a matter of importance, whether they had lived or not, provided a revered name could be affixed to a bone, or a putrid corpse, an extraordinary tale invented, and a number of legendary miracles affirmed; the relic was adored. Such was the dreadful aspect of Christendom.

CHAPTER III.

ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT, RITES AND CEREMONIES.

INCREASING power continued to raise the see of Rome to the great object of its ambition, *universal supremacy*, a title St. Gregory had branded in the patriarch of Constantinople three centuries before, as proud, heretical, blasphemous, and diabolical. Many bishops disputed the exorbitant pretensions of the pontiffs, and many nations refused implicit obedience to their decrees. These continued to be enforced by craft or violence, as circumstances dictated; always so managing the contest, as ultimately to gain some acquisition of wealth or dominion to the papal see.

The same cause produced the same effects. The ritual swelled with the continual additions made to the saints and relics. New forms, new festivals, new ceremonies, were invented; and it must be confessed, however stupidly ignorant of the Scriptures, at this work the clergy were not a little dexterous. The genuflexions, and bowings, and prostrations, were multiplied, varied, and every corporeal mark of homage to God Almighty, and his saintly ministers, courted them to be propitious to the suits of the petitioners.

But the service of the Virgin began to grow into especial repute, and as she was supposed to have the first influence in Heaven, celebrating masses to her honour, and multiplying devotions in her name, became a favourite service. A beautiful *rosary* and *crown* were now invented, consisting of vociferous repetitions of particular prayers. The first contained a powerful round of fifteen repetitions of the Lord's prayer, and one hundred and fifty ave-marias; and the latter of seven times repeating the Lord's prayer, and seven times ten salutations of the Virgin. It required, indeed, a good memory to keep the account; but a number of beads strung on catgut, or a cord, the size also of which had some virtue, and exhibiting a vast necklace, ingeniously provided for the task, by dropping a bead at every prayer and salutation, so that they might not cheat the Virgin of the tale, nor impose on themselves the trouble of supernumerary offices. That men could invent such fooleries, and popes confirm the sanctity and availableness of such *offices*, is among the most striking monuments of superstitious ignorance, and sacerdotal imposition.

CHAPTER IV.

HERESIES AND DISPUTES.

THE Nestorians and Monothelites being now chiefly under the Mahomedan government, and the Paulicians reduced and transported to Thrace, these controversies greatly subsided. One *Leutard*, a Frenchman, in the diocese of Chalons, endeavoured to revive the dispute about images, against which he vented his fury, even on a crucifix: and declaiming against tythes and sacerdotal impositions, he soon brought the bishop on his back; and being exposed to public shame, is reported, in despair to have thrown himself into a well. He however had followers, who are supposed to have joined the sect of the Albigenses, afterwards more notorious. These and some other trifling sectaries hardly deserve mention.

More important were the disputes between the Eastern and Western churches for jurisdiction. And what particularly agitated the Western world, the controversies were still kept up between the Pelagians and the followers of Godeschalcus; and between the Sacramentarians, who maintained the *real presence*, and those who admitted the elements to be *only symbols* of Christ's body. As the Church had not yet juridically decided on those points, the

disputants proceeded in the contest, and each held his own opinion unmolested, though he was unable to convince his antagonist. The seeds however were sown, from which in some future day a blessed harvest should arise; and though the empire of superstition generally prevailed, there were not wanting men who maintained the fundamentals of gospel truth, and lived by faith in the intelligent and sanctified use of divine ordinances.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRUE SPIRITUAL CHURCH.

I HAVE scarce a tittle to add to the account given of the last century. The same persons and people appear to be the depositaries of sacred truth, and the living monuments of the grace of God. A few may be culled out of the general body of the Church, as flowers out of a garden overgrown with weeds: and these, suffering from the contiguity of such bad neighbours, though rendered more observable by the barrenness and disfigured appearance of the wilderness around them. Such were Unni, Nilus and Giselbert. Yet after the most inquisitive search into their works, the flowers themselves are so scentless, that they are scarce worth gathering. Small indeed and contracted does the pale of the true Church appear; dispersed throughout the world in some favoured individuals, who were chosen, and called, and faithful; but the congregations of such, I fear, were thinly scattered, and scarcely any where so perceiveable as to be pointed out to human observation. Probably their insignificance was their protection; and their sequestered abodes their preservative from the enmity of persecutors, and the bigotry of the superstitious. A part of France and Switzer-

land, of Bohemia and Moravia, with the countries under the Saracenic dominion, where the Nestorians and Paulicians had taken refuge, afforded the principal living specimens of real religion. The followers of the good Godeschalcus and Claudius, with the purity of doctrine, experienced, I presume, the effects of the grace for which they contended. The vital spark remained unextinguished, though its light and heat were grown almost imperceptible.

CENTURY XI.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE STATE OF THE OUTWARD CHURCH.

THIS century began the bloody struggle between the Western world and the Mahomedan conquerors; an event which, however blazoned in history, I know not whether I shall number with the victories or desolations of the outward Church. SYLVESTER II. had published his piteous fictitious epistle from the Church at Jerusalem to the Western world; and though a shew of zeal had been excited to rescue the Christians from the Ottoman yoke, the fever quickly subsided, and the republic of Pisa only armed in the cause. But now the Roman pontiffs took up the sinking interests of Christianity in the East, and GREGORY VII. sounded the alarm of war through the nations of Europe. Quarrels more nearly interesting him with the Emperor Henry, suspended the preparations, and for a while deferred the attack; till PETER, *the hermit*, roused with his fanatic harangues, the slumbering zeal of the Christian princes and prelates, and became the tool of URBAN II. to carry into execution

this favorite plan of the papal see. Having visited the desolated plains of Palestine, and beheld the proud crescent displayed on mosques, once famed for Christian sanctuaries, Peter had returned with a burning imagination of the wrongs done to the cross; and painting with most pathetic eloquence the scenes he had witnessed, kindled a flame, which burst forth as a volcano. At first indeed he solicited the patriarch of Constantinople, and the crafty Urban, in vain. But when the latter saw the wide spreading effects of the hermit's oratory, seconded by a letter which he produced, sent down to him expressly from heaven by an Angel, to call the nations to the battle, there could be no longer resistance or delay to execute the divine mandate.

An. 1095. A council, called at Placentia by Urban, received, however, at first, the proposal but coldly. The cautious spirit of Italians was not up to the perilous enterprize; but the zealous pontiff, undismayed with difficulties and opposition, renewed the attack at Clermont, the following year, in a second grand assembly, where the valorous spirit of the Franks, proud of deeds of chivalry, and full of zeal for the holy Church, met the most sanguine wishes of their spiritual head; heard his pathetic discourses with all the mingled enthusiasm of the love of war, and zeal for religion; and enlisted by millions under the banner of the cross.

I mean not to trace the madness, the miseries, or the conquests of the crusaders. Suffice it merely

to say, that after various attempts, and armies after armies, perishing on the road, destroying the Christian countries through which they passed, and themselves by their excesses, one portion of them under the famous Godfrey, succeeded in the object of their enterprize: and conquering a part of Syria and Palestine, founded the kingdom of Jerusalem: (AN. 1099.) obtained at a rate of blood and treasure, unspeakably greater than would have peopled a nobler dominion, and purchased a richer principality: but two things served to render this conquest transcendently valuable in the eyes of the Christian conquerors—the supposed honour of their Master recovered, in the expulsion of the Saracens from the land of his nativity; and the cleansing the holy sepulchre from their profanations: and added to this, the abundance of inestimably precious relics, some found, and some purchased of Turks, Jews, and Syrians, and brought back to Europe in holy triumph.

Whether fanatic zeal, or deep laid policy to increase their power and accumulate wealth, actuated the Roman pontiffs, or both, certain it is, that whether previously designing it or not, from the beginning they failed not to make their profit of the prevailing madness of the times. The depopulation occasioned by the departure of many hundreds of thousands of the best blood of Europe, left whole provinces desolated, and their noblest defenders saw their native land no more. To equip themselves for this expedition, princes, nobles, and people, parted with their territories,

dukedoms, and whatever they possessed; which were mortgaged and sold, to the utter impoverishment of their families: and a change was made in the state of Europe, which the see of Rome craftily turned to its own advantage. The riches accumulated in churches and monasteries, where the greatest abundance of the precious metals were found, obtained advantageous purchases from these adventurers, and added to the pious donations for *the redemption of their souls*, amazingly increased the possessions of the Church.

The profligacy of manners which prevailed among the crusaders; the rapes, murders, plunder, and desolation, that marked their track, were wretched specimens of the holiness of their purposes; and they who could inflict such miseries on their fellow Christians, must have borne against the Saracens a spirit as infuriate as the cause which stimulated them was fanatic, and reconcilable to no laws of human justice. Yet scarcely a man in that day doubted the lawfulness of the enterprize; nay its meritoriousness was the constant topic which resounded in every pulpit; sanctioned by the solemn absolution from all sins, granted by the representative of St. Peter, to such as might fall in this glorious expedition: and at least securing to them a place in the highest heavens, should they never live to enter the promised land. Thus every thing contributed to excite and continue the infatuation of the Western world. As for the East, trembling with the fear of their friends, much more than of their enemies, they were obliged to keep

a watchful eye at home, and to guard their own territories from the ravages or surprise of the warrior pilgrims, who were very little delicate on this behalf.

An. 1077. But Jerusalem was not the noblest conquest of the Christian warriors from the Saracenic dominion. A valiant Norman, Robert Guischard, had subdued the dukedom of Apuglia, and with his equally famous brother Roger, his companion in the enterprise, had received baptism, and submitted to the dominion of the Roman pontiff. Liberal in the gifts of kingdoms, to which he had no shadow of right or claim, the Pope offered to confer on him the crown of Sicily, if he would but jeopard himself in measuring spears with the Mahomedan conquerors, and recover that beautiful island to the Christian pale, and obedience to the Roman see. Robert accepted the invitation, and accomplished the expulsion of the Saracens: and as his reward received the investiture of this new acquisition, and was crowned king of Sicily, with privileges that have ever since been matter of bitter contest. The Christian religion, which had been nearly extinct, he revived; and according to the pious ideas of the times, founded bishoprics, abbeys, and churches, in abundance, with revenues truly princely.

Boleslaus of Poland, boasts of equal conquests in the North, where, along the borders of the Baltic, from Mecklinburgh to Russia, a number of barbarous nations, Vandals, Prussians, and Sclavonians, still continued in the darkness of paganism.

Adelbert, bishop of Prague, prompted by his zeal, is reported to have lost his life among them by a pagan priest; and as the labours of the apostolic missionaries had proved abortive, the Polish monarch resolved to employ more effectual weapons; and entering the country with an army which they were unable to resist, he compelled the reluctant brutes to bow their necks to the Christian yoke, and receive baptism from the priests who attended him in the expedition. He left with them these instructors to inform their minds, under a famed missionary, named Boniface; but they fell sacrifices to the rage and enmity of their catechumens, and it was long before the deep rooted practices of paganism were utterly extirpated.

Far nobler conquests are said to be effected by persuasion, through the labours of zealous apostles among the remaining tribes of Russians, Poles, Danes, and Hungarians, who still adhered to the pagan superstitions. But of all the missionary efforts to propagate the Christian religion, none seem to be more effectual, and to be founded on purer principles, than those of the Nestorians in the East, who penetrated still farther into Asia, and spread the knowledge of the truth among the vast hordes or Northern Tartars.

Yet, in the East and West, Christianity lost nearly as much as it appeared to gain. The Turks and Saracens still contending for dominion, inflicted the most abundant sufferings on the Christians, which ever side prevailed. The Grecian empire, weakened by civil and religious discord, presented

a feeble barrier against their inroads, and province after province, was separated from the Christian pale. And wherever their power prevailed, their religion became little less triumphant. The severity of their tributary exactions on the one hand, and the desire of procuring advancement and property on the other, tempted too many to submit to the profession of Mahomedism, and blend their interest and religion with the prevailing party. It is always a mighty argument fo swim with the stream, and to do as others. Thus the populous nations under the Turkish and Saracenic governments, generally apostatized from the confession of the faith, and adopted the crescent for the cross.

The same causes produced the same effects in Spain, and every territory under the Mahomedan government; and there was every reason to apprehend the extirpation of the faith in that country, had not a little band of Christians, rallying round their petty king, Pelagius, maintained their expiring cause, and ultimately extended their conquests in the recovery of their country.

CHAPTER II.

INTERNAL STATE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

THE history of the Church in these unhappy ages, resembles the roll of Ezekiel, filled with lamentation and mourning and woe. The external state, even where apparently prosperous, exhibits but a fallacious prosperity. The conversions scarce deserve the name, and correspond too sadly with the means by which they were produced : and all within the bosom of the Church was corrupt, and become abominable—a cage of unclean birds. In the East, the rapidity of revolutions was as fatal to the peace of the Church as to the prosperity of the empire. Their domestic tumults wasted the strength and destroyed the resources of the Greeks ; they had neither courage nor ability to resist the spreading inundation of their Mahomedan foes without, and as little inclination to cultivate the interests of religion, or of letters within. The contests for the patriarchate banished all Christian charity and piety ; and though the field of polemics called some ingenious disputants into the battle, the Church, and science itself, rather lost than gained by their disputes and animosities. Psellus stands eminent in the ranks, as a logician and philosopher : but the palm of praise in the study, as in the field, was carried off beyond all competition, by

the Mahomedans, in whose schools medicine, mathematics, and every branch of science flourished most abundantly. All learning among Christians was chiefly confined to the monasteries, where a few of a literary turn amused themselves with the pursuits of knowledge, which rendered their solitude and indolence more supportable, without sharing in the vices of their brethren.

The Normans, from pagan became Christian, and from barbarians, addicted to letters, carried with them into England, Italy and Sicily, a relish for the pursuits which they promoted, and introduced through the medium of their countrymen, a beam of light into these regions of the shadow of death. Schools were erected superior to the monastic and cathedral ones, where little was taught worth learning; and masters who had studied under the Arabic doctors of Spain, instructed their pupils with success in the most useful sciences. Physic was especially cultivated at Salernum in the kingdom of the Normans; and astronomy, with the mathematics, made a considerable progress, which would have been still greater, if the folly of the times had not turned the minds of many to the vain pursuits of astrology, and instead of a diligent observance of the heavenly luminaries, and their revolutions, attempted from the motions and conjunctions of the planets to read the fate of empires and of individuals.

The favourite study of the Western Church was logic and Aristotle. The disputes generated be-

tween the *nominalists* and *realists*, however important at the time, to us appear absurd and contemptible: and as far as the Church is concerned, are nothing worth. Yet these exercised the acuteness, and occupied the attention of many of the greatest scholars of the day.

The eminent prelate Anselm, of Canterbury, shone conspicuous in various treatises on metaphysics and natural religion: discussed the nature of God, his attributes and mode of existence; and extended his researches to the divine prescience and human liberty. But all the superstitions of former ages continued unsuppressed; the same rage and reverence prevailed for relics as ever, yea, increasing; as if they supplied the place of every thing holy and heavenly. And all these learned men and great prelates were the first to stamp importance and value on these wretched fragments of corpses, and rags of old linen.

The pride and ambition of the superior ecclesiastics, even where their outward conduct was not branded with the prevailing vices, marked strongly Anselm and his fellows; but the general behaviour of the clergy was scandalous in the extreme. The Western bishops being advanced to be counts and dukes and barons, and enriched with the liberal donations of the faithful, fought under their own banners; in the camp, commanded their liegemen, knights and warriors; at the courts of princes appeared with a magnificence and train of followers, which eclipsed all the nobility;

and at their own palaces lived so superbly, amidst a crowd of domestics, clergy and laity, as if their kingdom was wholly of this world. Encouraged by such ghostly examples, the inferior orders put in for their share of luxury and indulgence, and with their patrons lived a life of sporting, pleasure, and sensual gratifications, sufficiently safe in the weekly mass, on the repetition of the rosary. A laborious preacher of God's word, a self-denied follower of the crucified Master, was scarcely to be found: vice and ignorance had nearly exterminated every remains of vital godliness—Like priest, like people.

CHAPTER III.

GOVERNMENT, HERESIES, DISPUTES, RITES, AND CEREMONIES.

THE Roman Pontiffs were now nearly arrived at the long wished for object of universal dominion; at least in the Western world: none dared to peep or mutter against their decrees. To them appeals were made; they presided in all councils by their legates; and claimed the right of deciding all religious controversy by their infallible dictates. Princes indeed often, when able, endeavoured to limit their pretensions, and bishops murmured, and submitted, where the danger of resistance was so great. Their claims were become boundless, they asserted a right to confer all ecclesiastical honours and emoluments, as originally derived from them by divine authority; they assumed the disposition of kingdoms, and the bestowal of titles upon monarchs; their decisions were sought in all disputed rights. They absolved subjects from their allegiance; and set up kings and emperors as best suited their own ambitious designs. Many of the greatest monarchs contributed to these exorbitant pretensions, by applying to the holy see to sanction the purposes of their ambition, or to vindicate their quarrels. Yet, when seated on the thrones which they had usurped, they maintained with a vigorous

hand the regalities of their kingdoms, against the impudent and exorbitant claims of these vicars of Christ. A long and rapid succession to the papal see would lead me too far to particularize; suffice it to say, that of some decent, some profligate, and all united in equal purposes of ambitious aggrandisement, not an appearance of real piety and genuine Christianity is to be found from first to last. The Emperors, when strong, interfered, and by their authority raised to the pontificate and degraded from it; and when weak or pusillanimous, stooped to the most humiliating abasement.

To exclude the nobility and people of Rome from the right of suffrage in electing to the holy see, with whom hitherto that privilege had vested, in conjunction with the cardinals or chief clergy of Rome, Nicholas II. confined it wholly to the latter. (An. 1058.) The institution itself, and the persons entitled to this honour, have afforded much matter of dispute: suffice it to say that the *cardinal bishops* were the seven provincial bishops of the Roman territory; the *cardinal clerks*, the twenty-eight principal parish presbyters. The *cardinal deacons* were afterwards added, to remove the murmurs of the most popular of the clergy, who felt themselves injured by their exclusion. The clergy being gained by preferment, or the hope of preferment, the people tamely submitted. Yet in the election of that fiend *Hildebrand*, (An. 1073.) no regard was paid to the established order, and he was raised to the see by general suffrage, and confirmed in it by the Emperor, against whom he presently raised a tempest, which shook the

pillars of his throne. Unrestrained by any dictates of truth and justice, and presuming upon the distractions of the time, he had the audacity to attempt, and in many instances to succeed in rendering not only the Church absolutely subjected to him, but to extend his empire over princes and monarchs, as feudatories of the Roman see, deriving their power from it, and holding their kingdoms under the pontifical chair. A design so vast, required more than the powers of Rome papal to realize; and however in an hour of weakness some bowed to this audacious prelate's feet, others more resolute, and possessing ability to dispute these impudent pretensions, maintained their independence, and refused to subjugate their crowns to such insolent claims. Britain and Gaul distinguished themselves in this contest, and maintained their rights, in part at least, against the usurpations of Rome. The letters of Hildebrand or Gregory, yet extant, are monuments of the most daring attempts to subjugate to his yoke, and levy a tribute from the dominions of all the princes of Christendom. Fear or favour induced many of them to submit, whilst others resisted the claim of St. Peter's representative. Thus from a thousand channels, the wealth of the nations flowed into the Roman treasury. The most resolute, however refractory, submitted to so many pretensions and abuses, that not a kingdom of the Western world but contributed to support the ambition, and to increase the immensity of the treasures of the Roman prelate. The arrogance of his pride, as well as the rapaciousness of his avarice, all the records of the times, and

his numerous epistles, abundantly testify. He not only ever after emancipated the election of the Popes from the Emperor's ratification, but extended his claims over the Emperors themselves.

An. 1077. But a more solid and substantial acquisition he also secured by an intrigue with the rich heiress of the Duke of Tuscany, Matilda, who left the Roman see the whole of her vast and valuable possessions: and though the Emperor and other princes demurred to the testament, and prevented its entire execution, yet the Roman Pontiff secured a considerable share, and continued to claim the whole; little careful of the mode of the acquisition, if by any means he could aggrandize the see, the great object of his ambition.

Yet though himself emancipated from restraint, and free to gratify all his other passions, as well as his lust of dominion, no man was more severe on the poor priests, who preferred the married to the single state, or, as was more common in that day, indulged in concubinage; (An. 1074.) nor was he less violent against the simoniacal disposal of ecclesiastical benefices, as common a crime, and shamefully extending even to bishoprics; but he found no small difficulty to carry his edicts into execution: and though armed with all the power of church and state, many chose to incur the papal fulminations, and quit their benefices rather than their wives and children. And as good thus often comes out of human evil, some of them separated from the Romish communion, and joined the little

band in the valleys of Piedmont, who wished to maintain a purer worship, and to escape from ecclesiastical tyranny. The rest, after many a tumult, were obliged to submit; and if they were not more continent, were at least obliged to be more secret in their amours.

But the subject of simony met with greater opposition still, as those most chargeable with it, were in high places. The Emperor, Henry IV, and his princes and bishops, would not allow Gregory's legates to hold a council in Germany to confirm his edicts; and he was compelled to summons one at Rome, where his will was law; and he avenged himself by anathemas, not only hurled against simoniacal contracts, (An. 1075.) but against every man who should receive investiture of bishopric or abbey, from the hands of a layman, or who presumed to confer it. And this thunder of excommunication was not more designed to check simoniacal contracts, than to obtain for the Church of Rome universally, the right claimed of conferring these beneficial preferments; and excluding the Emperor and Princes, who had hitherto considered them as their royal prerogatives: however he dared not openly challenge so extensive a claim, but fixed his objection to *the manner* of the investiture, by the bishop's ring and crosier, which he regarded as a high profanation, to be transmitted through the hands of a layman, as if Emperors and Princes, by so doing, exercised a spiritual authority, and conferred by these badges of the pastoral office, and of union with the Church as their

spouse, some exercise of ghostly authority, appurtenant only to the visible Head and Master of the Church. These contests of ambition produced fearful and fatal consequences in the empire. The Emperor resolutely maintained his privileges, and the issue of the conflict had been little dubious, had not the intriguing pontiff gained a number of the Germanic Princes, Henry's avowed enemies, and fomenting the rebellion of the electors against their head, insolently summoned the Emperor to answer the criminal charges laid against him, before himself at Rome. The rage of the insulted monarch knew no bounds; he convoked a council at Worms; accused and condemned the flagitious Gregory, and deposed him from his sacred office. (AN. 1076.) Mad with fury, the Roman pontiff levelled at Henry's head all the thunders of the Church; cast him out as excommunicate; degraded him from his throne: and, blasphemously assuming divine prerogatives, absolved his subjects from their oath of allegiance.

Little indeed to be apprehended were these terrors, if the revolt of the German Princes had not collected a force which Henry felt himself unable to resist. Threatened with the election of another Emperor, he meanly hasted to throw himself at the feet of the Pope, and avert by his submission the consequences which he now dreaded. Gregory was amusing himself at Canusium, with his endeared Matilda. AN. 1077. It was the depth of winter, and three days the suppliant Emperor was kept with bare feet, and head uncovered, girt with

sack-cloth around his shivering limbs, whilst the holy father and his mistress enjoyed the triumph of his humiliation. Scarcely admitted to the insolent pontiff's presence, he received absolution only on the hard condition of suspension from all regal honours, till an approaching congress should decide his fate. But this humiliation was of very short continuance; stung with the reproaches of his Italian vassals, the Emperor resumed the symbols of royalty, and resolved to abide the contest, whilst his enemies elected Rodolph of Swabia to the throne, which they had declared vacant.

Battle upon battle, gave alternately the ascendant to the combatants, till the death of Rodolph raised Henry to a decided superiority, and marching to Rome in spite of the opposition from the troops of Matilda and the Normans, he placed a Pope of his own election in the chair, Clement III. Hardly rescued from the death of ignominy which he had deserved, by the courage of Guiscard, Gregory escaped the fate which awaited him, and died at Salernum; (An. 1084.) leaving the fruitful seeds of future wars and bloodshed to gratify the lust and ambition of God's vicegerents upon earth. Yet the horribility of such conduct, prevented not the beatification of this turbulent pontiff.

A schism now took place in the papal chair; each of the contending parties elected his several Pope, and as they deceased, for a long while filled up the vacancy. New anathemas, and scenes of slaughter, treachery and devastation, followed to the end of

the century. Thus for a trifling ceremony was the Christian world in the West, wasted with desolation and deluged with blood, to gratify the insolence and ambition of one great wicked priest.

The monks, encouraged by papal protection, and now especially induced by this Gregory to list under the banners of Rome, endeavoured to withdraw themselves wholly from all other jurisdiction to become the liegemen of the Roman see. Immunity from all other prelates or princes' visitation, was eagerly coveted by the monks, and willingly granted by this assuming pontiff; who thus strengthened his force by these legions of auxiliaries: and they, in turn, now only dependent on Rome, indulged with more unbridled restraint, the gratification of every appetite and passion, which luxury engendered, which wealth supported, and which impunity from all consequences encouraged. Yet astonishing to tell, from these seminaries of vice, most of the ecclesiastical dignitaries were taken, and such was the ignorance and superstition of the age, that peculiar sanctity was supposed to be attached to the monkish orders; and kings, nobles and merchants, to expiate former crimes, or insure at the end of their lives a short and sure passage to heaven, either compromised by large legacies, or entered into the fraternity, that they might enjoy the plenitude of merit annexed to the sacred profession.

Monkery being now so highly venerated, a new field for ambition opened. The fraternity of Clugni being in the eyes of the vulgar supposed to live

in the greatest odour of sanctity, their abbot extended amazingly his reforms and jurisdiction ; though the peculiar strictness and austerities which they affected, soon degenerated with their increasing wealth to the common standard of corruption.

An. 1023. Reforms attempted among the Benedictines, the great prevailing order, divided the body ; each vying with the other, the Camaldulite hermits arose in the Appenines, the Cistertians in France: and affecting the most rigid rules, attracted the reverence of that superstitious age; the folly of which could not be more strongly marked than in the endowment of 1800 monasteries of the Cistertian order, who all set off with the most mortified pretensions, and as wealth and abundance flowed in upon them, ended exactly in the same point of dissolution of manners.

The orders of Grandmontains and Carthusians, still endeavoured to exceed in severity of discipline, and in absolute silence, poverty, and obedience, all others of their brethren ; and by vows as unnatural, as unscriptural, to affect a superiority of perfection above their fellows. The pride and folly of these men, who once made a great noise in the world, are now beome the object of ridicule, and after too long a reign of ignorance, the final extinction of these unchristian societies seems approaching.

The canons and canonesses, and their rules and regulations, hardly deserve mention, unless to prove their not degenerating from the ghostly examples of their brethren.

What the state of religion must be amidst such multiplied abuses, from the head at Rome to the lowest of the tonsured tribe, may easily be imagined. The people ignorant, superstitious, devout and profligate, yielded implicit faith and obedience to their clerical superiors, who, furnishing them with absolution and passports to St. Peter, thought themselves justly entitled to the plunder which they extorted. The endless rites and ceremonies, and the pageantry attending them, kept up a constant pagan raree-show, which amused that imbecile age, and diverted them from attending to the frauds and scandals of the clergy. The reverence for saints and relics rose to the altitude of Deity; an oath upon a bone, a finger, or a nail of the cross, was supposed to be much more solemn and binding than any simple appeal to God as the searcher of hearts. Indeed, the scriptures of truth, and the nature of moral obligations, in this age found but miserable expositors: whilst all the subtleties of Aristotle, and the scholastic divinity built upon them, bestowed upon the possessors of these nonsensical attainments the dignity of Christian philosophers; and the famous Lanfranc, the archbishop of Canterbury, and singularly eminent in this line, undertook, ridiculously enough, to defend *transubstantiation* on philosophical principles!

The mystic divinity was little less absurd than the scholastic, and bewildering the mind in reverie and abstractedness of contemplation, led off the Christian from the simplicity of revealed truth, to an inward light and an ideal spirituality of devotion.

Anselm, who, notwithstanding his prelatical pride, appears one of the best characters in that line, has left some devotional tracts not contemptible, and a treatise against infidels, marked with depth of thought and singular acuteness: but the reality of religion was so lost in forms and superstitious practices, that those who figure the highest, afford sorry specimens of divine truth. The alloy utterly debases the gold.

The heresies, that in former ages engaged so much polemic controversy, in this were superseded by disputes that were equally violent, and equally absurd.

The first arose from the abominable ambition of the Roman pontiff, in endeavouring to seduce the patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem from the jurisdiction of Constantinople to his own. A war of words and excommunication followed. Vain was the attempt of the Grecian Emperor, who wanted the Romish support against the Normans, to conciliate the parties. The Roman legates sent on this occasion, met so much opposition, that shaking off the dust of their feet, and puffing it with all possible violence and malignity of anathemas into the eyes of their enemies, they departed in a rage. The Constantinopolitan Patriarch, equally embittered in spirit, returned the dust and the excommunication, and had the Roman bull publicly burnt by the Emperor's order. As these doughty champions for Christianity, each at the head of empires, fought with nearly equal arms, it is ridicu-

lous enough to record the heinous crimes retorted upon the Latin churches. That they used unleavened bread in the Eucharist—did not abstain from things strangled, and blood—that their monks eat lard, and permitted even flesh to their sick brethren—that bishops wore rings—and priests effeminately shaved their beards. These, with other like important charges, were disputed and debated with all the rancor of sacerdotal acrimony. The real ground, however, was lordly jurisdiction.

A more important dispute was stirred up by the bishop of Chalcedon. The poor Alexis, Emperor of the East, was compelled by distress to melt down some silver platings of the church doors, and some images of saints of the like precious metal. This was not only sacrilege in the prelate's eye, but impiety against the *inherent sanctity* which dwelt in these venerable representatives. A solemn council was necessary to terminate the dispute.

An. 1004. But the grand contest which made the chief noise in the Christian world, respected the body of Christ in the eucharist. Leutharic, archbishop of Sens, had affirmed, that none but the faithful received the body of Christ in that ordinance: but so *shocking* a supposition was quickly hushed up by king Robert and the prelate's friends. He had better enjoy his bishopric and hold his tongue. This prudent counsel he followed. Berenger, a man eminent for his learning and Christian purity, would not keep silence, but zealously maintained that no change whatever passed

on the symbols in the Eucharist, agreeable to the representation of the famed Scotus, and that they were merely the signs of Christ's *absent* body. Leo IX. the Roman pontiff, kindled at the derogatory idea. An. 1050. Council upon council condemned Berenger and his doctrine, and consigned the book of Scotus to the flames. Henry of France seconded his holiness, and threatened the most severe judgments against Berenger, now archbishop of Angers, confiscating his revenues until he recanted. But he was not a man to be easily intimidated, and boldly maintained the truth against the Monarch, the Pope, and all their abettors. As Berenger was supported by numerous disciples, the politic Leo IX. suffered the contest to sleep for a while. At his death, his more imprudent successor, Victor II. sent his legate into France to renew the condemnation; and, in repeated councils, the famous Hildebrand, afterwards Pope, vented all his bitterness, and not only repeated the censures of the Church, but compelled the poor archbishop of Angers, it is said, by terror, to abjure his opinions, and be reconciled to the Roman see.

Whether this is true in all its latitude, is dubious. That he was borne down by clamour and authority is pretty clear, and stooped to some mortifying compliances to avert the thunder levelled at his head. Yet his conscience overcame his terrors, and he could not refrain from maintaining truths of which he had the fullest conviction. This produced a fresh summons to Rome, where a new council assembled under Nicolas, overawed the solitary witness, and compelled him to sub-

scribe what so venerable an assembly decided, as the catholic faith: and this he was engaged to acknowledge by an oath, to give the greater solemnity to the confession. We cannot but lament human infirmity. Let no man rashly censure compliances made under the impulse of fear. He felt all his danger, and therefore submitted to acknowledge, *the real body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, to be eaten by the faithful, not in a sacramental sense, but in reality and truth, as other sensible objects are.* A sentiment so shocking and abhorrent to common sense, as well as so utterly opposite to his convictions, he renounced the moment he had escaped from the papal tyranny, and taken refuge in his own diocese. With shame and contrition he owned the hypocritical part he had been compelled to act, and zealously recommenced the defender of the doctrines of truth. As he was now removed from the papal grasp, the crafty Alexander II. sought to seduce him, by cajoleries, to return to his former confession: but he rejected the idea with abhorrence, and with greater activity disseminated the doctrines of the gospel, and acquired a multitude of disciples.

Gregory the VIIIth, the famous Hildebrand, by whose threats he had been first intimidated, now advanced to the papal see, wished to heal this bitter breach: and whether really convinced by Berenger's arguments or not, he certainly shewed him a kindness and favour little consonant to the violence of his character. Unable to resist the torrent of Berenger's adversaries, he summoned him to

Rome, and admitted him to draw up a new confession of faith, very different from what had been extorted by his predecessor Nicolas. An. 1078. This, though more ambiguous and equivocal, he accepted, revoking the decisions of the former Pope and council. The enemies of Berenger professed themselves far from satisfied, and at their instigation a third council was held, and a third confession extorted more explicit than the second, but still coming short of the first. An. 1079. With this Gregory declared himself content, and sent him back with every token of esteem and favour. But alas! the troubled conscience of Berenger forbade him to rest, in the last, any more than in the former equivocation. He renewed the avowal of his real sentiments, and overwhelmed with abuse and virulence, to which he made no reply, he *solemnly* confessed his crime, and retiring from the world to spend his remaining days in mortification and prayer, for pardon of the baseness of his conduct, crying out, "Fountain of mercy, be gracious to a wretch acknowledging his great offence!"

Gregory evidently in this matter acted not from conviction, but from the knowledge of those with whom he had to do, and whom he dared not offend. There is a singular trait preserved, whether of his fanaticism or hypocrisy, in a letter addressed to Berenger before the assembling of the last council. "I have no doubt," said he, "of the rectitude of your sentiments, respecting the sacrifice "of Christ according to the Scriptures; but it is "my custom to have recourse to the Virgin Mary

"concerning matters which are in agitation." In consequence of which application he informs him: "The blessed Virgin Mary hath heard and answered me, that I should think, and hold nothing "respecting the sacrifice of Christ, but what the "Scriptures expressly mention, against which, "Berenger hath advanced nothing contrary to "truth. I wished to communicate this to you, "that you might come to me with the most assured "confidence and alacrity." It is singular enough, that one Pope and council should condemn the decisions of the preceding ones; then consult the Virgin Mary; commend Berenger's orthodoxy by an express revelation from her; and afterwards, in compliance with the last council, extort another confession different both from the former Pope and council, and from the approbation of the blessed Virgin herself. But Popes, as well as others, must temporize when the current of enthusiasm runs strong against them.

The doctrine of Berenger expired not with him. His followers became multiplied; and a new seed was sown, which vegetated to bring forth fruit unto God, and to preserve the holy truths of the gospel, that they should not utterly fail.

A sect, of which frequent mention has been made, began now to grow into observation in the West, and to attract persecution. The Paulicians, charged with Manichæan heresies, had been banished into Bulgaria by the Grecian Emperor. From thence some migrated into Italy, and others had spread through France and Germany. AN. 1050.

Their solemn looks and exemplary behaviour engaged the respect of many. They bore a number of appellations, Patarini, Bulgares, Cathari, and *Bons Hommes*, or good men, for such they certainly appeared to be. Whether the opinions imputed to them be true or not, it is difficult to decide, when we consider the ignorance and superstition of the age, and the enmity borne to whatever deserved the name of Christian. Certain it is they were bitterly persecuted; and early in this century condemned as heretics at Orleans, and burned for their obstinacy. AN. 1017. From the charges laid against them, it appears, that revolting against the worship of images, purgatory, penances, relics, and all the multitudinous abuses prevalent in the Church, they probably carried their objections to the opposite extreme, and thought slightly of all ordinances and ministers, supposed all distinctions useless among the faithful, and sacraments unnecessary; confining all their religion to spiritual worship and a holy conversation. Condemned afterwards, at a council held at Albi, they gained the name of Albigenses, a term frequently given to all reputed heretics. AN. 1076. As their enemies never produced a charge to impeach their genuine piety, and their patient and resolute sufferings speak forcibly in their favour, it is a strong presumptive evidence, that whatever errors they may have been really chargeable with, and to whatever blameable excess they might have carried some of their opinions, the root of the matter was in them; and their unpardonable crimes were their rejecting the tyranny and fraud of a corrupt priest-

hood, whom they thus rendered inveterate against them, and from whom they could expect no mercy. All power being now monopolized by these partial judges in their own cause, and the secular arm ready to execute their sentences, a poor Paulician could as little hope for an impartial hearing at their bar, as to escape from their judgment.

An. 1092. The famed Roscelinus, a chief of the dialectic sect called *Realists*, was accused of atheism, because he maintained that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, were not to be placed in the rank of *names* or *denominations*, but of *things* or *realities*. After tedious disputations on a subject so abstruse, and above the ken of human intellect, he was condemned at Soissons, and, driven from place to place, died in Aquitain.

An. 1023. A more absurd contention, raised and maintained by the monks of Limoges, whether their first pretended Bishop Martial, was an apostle, and one of Christ's seventy disciples: after long and fierce disputes, at last was by the Roman Pontiff decided in their favour. That absurdities so glaring, and on subjects so trivial, should for years together engage the attention of popes and councils, is a degrading monument of the imbecility of the age.

Forms and ceremonies multiplied abundantly, and were made of the most solemn importance. The overbearing Gregory VII, among his other pretensions, required all worship to conform to the

model of Rome. The Spanish ritual, from the beginning, had corresponded with the Gothic formula, and the Spaniards were reluctant to quit their ancient usage. The imperious pontiff enforced the abolition. It was referred to single combat; the Gothic champion prevailed: a second ordeal by fire was referred to; the Gothic ritual passed, it is affirmed, the flames unhurt. But Gregory persevered. The Queen Constantia favoured the Pope, and King Antonio consented to adopt the Roman ritual, in opposition to the wishes of the people, and what was then generally supposed, the dictates of heaven;—such dominion had the papal see assumed over the consciences of men. But a still more glaring abuse followed, in compelling all the Western nations to use the *Latin* tongue in the public service of the Church, though it was now a language no where spoken, nor commonly understood. And thus a new source of ignorance among the people was introduced; and their prayers, which had long been mere form, were now absolutely without any meaning, and unintelligible.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TRUE CHURCH

MATTERS were verging now to the utmost extremity. But God was providing for a revival of his own work; and by few and feeble means, to preserve a chosen generation, that the earth might not become as Sodoma, and be made like unto Gomorrha.

I remark the same spirit among the Nestorians, of what appears real zeal. Some hidden ones remained in the vallies of the Alps. England still afforded sparks of light. A few had not wholly abandoned truth and godliness. The good presbyters, who refused to part with their wives and families, and chose rather to be cast out, offered a concientious and resolute stand against unchristian usurpations; and Berengarius, the Archbishop of Angers, and others besides them, held many of the essential truths of God, though often compelled to conceal their sentiments by the dreadful persecutions to which they knew they must subject themselves; hoping probably, however mistaken, that they could do more good secretly, than by raising a violent clamour against themselves and their doctrines, The example of Berenger would tend to deter the more eminent in learning and clerical

advancement, who might think with him. But I apprehend the number of such was truly inconsiderable, and that the great body of his disciples, and of those who still retained the true doctrine, was to be found in the inferior stations of the Church, and among the unlettered of the laity; in whose hearts the spirit of God continued to give the understanding which is after godliness, and who received the Scriptures in simplicity and truth.

The warmth with which the disputes were managed, naturally awakened general enquiry; and however the multitude were swayed by authority, and enslaved with priest-craft, some, many, no doubt, considered the subjects with attention, and formed their conclusions according to common sense and the Scriptures. Whilst Augustin, Godeschalcus, and others were read, some beams of gospel-truth could not to fail to dart through the prevailing gloom, and help a few at least to find their way to heaven and glory, through the one mediator Jesus Christ.

I cannot but conclude, that the persecuted Paulicians were, at least many of them, faithful servants of our Lord. I am always loth to receive the accusations of interested adversaries, especially where the gospel of Christ is the subject. Whatever mistakes these men might have been chargable with at first, often, as with other sects, the dross has been purged away, and the purity of truth been preserved. With their enemies and

persecutors, there was evidently nothing but ignonorance, insolence, formality, superstition, and cruelty.

The disciples of Methodius and Cyril, still continued to transmit their purer tenets to their disciples, who continued in Bohemia and Moravia; and kept alive a seed counted to the Lord for a generation: and though scarcely vegetating, were preserved in a succeeding generation to bring forth plenteous fruits of righteousness.

CENTURY XII.

CHAPTER I.

STATE OF THE CHURCH WITHOUT.

THE western warriors had erected the banners of the Cross on the towers of Jerusalem, and spread their trophies on the walls of Antioch and Edessa, when the Mahometans, recovering from the consternation into which repeated defeats had thrown them, rallied their forces: and though they met an obstinate resistance, they returned to the charge, straitening the Christians in Syria and Palestine, and after the conquest of Edessa, threatened Antioch and Jerusalem itself. The cries of the afflicted reached the Roman see, and Europe heard the groans of their brethren with anguish, and resentment of their wrongs. They trembled for the fate of the holy sepulchre, and all the precious relics still buried in Palestine. The Roman Pontiffs sounded the alarm, and princes, clergy and people assembled to debate the propriety of the measures which they proposed, and to contrive the means of their execution. The danger, the distance, the ill-success of the former attempts, the dear-bought experience of Saracen valour, and the inability of any single kingdom to provide a sufficient force

for such an enterprize; the jealousy of the monarchs of each other; the difficulty to collect the various nations under one leader; these all seemed to present an insurmountable barrier to a second crusade. The dreadful effects of the former had not yet ceased to be felt and lamented. The Pope's propositions and exhortations were therefore heard with caution, and canvassed without enthusiasm. It required some flaming spirit to infuse new life into the dying cause of crusades; and such was found in the famous Bernard, Abbot of Clairval. Darting like lightning from his convent, his ardor and eloquence kindled the latent spark of zeal into a flame through France and Germany; where this itinerant apostle of the cross travelled, every where surrounded by thousands. His confident assurances of success from Heaven, promised to him, were heard and believed not only by the credulous multitude, but by Lewis of France, his Queen and nobles assembled, who crossed themselves immediately for the conflict. AN. 1146. The Emperor Conrad, for a while demurred, but vanquished by by the powerful arguments, and heaven-bearing commission of Bernard, associated himself in the enterprize, to reap laurels and victory, which must attend their standard, as God's inspired prophet had assured them. But alas! the event corresponded not with the prediction. The monarchs with their armies proceeded by different routes for the place of their destination; and after the most perilous and tedious travels by land and sea, brought only the fragments of their numerous hosts to witness the Christian disgrace: betrayed by friends;

destroyed by enemies: the spirit of discord alike prevailed in the crusading armies, as among the leaders in Palestine. Tired of the fruitless and unhappy expedition, they hardly set their foot on the Holy land, ere they prepared to return to Europe, and not a tenth of their numerous warriors saw their native land again. The prophecies of Bernard proved as false as fatal. AN. 1153.

The famous Saladin taking occasion of the weakness of the Christian cause, still rendered more desperate by the profligacy of their manners, and their mutual disputes, jealousies, and ambition, fell upon Judea, took the king of Jerusalem, Lusignan, prisoner in battle, and besieged and carried the city with considerable resistance. The desolation was dreadful; torrents of blood flowed; thousands and tens of thousands of miserable Christians were sold into captivity; their power was humbled to the dust, and their name almost extinguished in the East. AN. 1187.

The dreadful tidings reached Italy and the Western world, like the stroke of the thunderbolt. Astonishment, anguish, and despair overwhelmed the Christian nations; roused by the dreadfulness of the catastrophe, the mightiest monarchs of Europe started from their thrones, seized their armour, and prepared themselves for the perilous conflict, resolved to conquer or perish beneath the walls of Jerusalem. But the enterprize corresponded not with their ardor, and the greatness of their preparations. The first auspicious campaign of the Emperor Frederick, was quickly followed by his

death, caught by bathing in the cold waters of the Cydnus. Disease, more fatal than the sword of the Mahomedans, thinned the ranks of his warriors; unequal to any great enterprize, the rest disbanded, and few returned to tell the dismal tale of their sufferings and disappointment.

AN. 1191. The king of France, Philip Augustus, and the lion hearted Richard of England, each pressed into the service, and followed the adventurous Frederick. They endeavoured to shorten the voyage, and to lessen the danger of a long march, by an embarkation from Italy; and arriving safe at the head of their several armies, the Saracenic hosts trembled before them, and the first successful contests promised them conquests and victory: but the French monarch weakened the cause by his desertion, and returned; and all the heroic arts of Richard after this defection, were only sufficient to erect a trophy to his valour, without procuring any solid advantages for his brethren. Tired with the bloody and unavailing conflict on both sides, a short truce afforded a breathing time of three years, three months, and three days. AN. 1192. Saladin continued in possesion of what he had conquered, and the Christians of the poor remains of their former possessions; whilst the noble Richard returning to his own land to prepare for greater exploits, experienced at the hands of a Roman Emperor of Germany, baseness and cruelty, which an infidel Saladin would have disdained; and lingered long under an inglorious captivity, till all hopes in the East were thus totally extinguished.

The miseries which these expeditions occasioned in the Christian world, are incalculable: England, France, Germany, were exhausted of men and money: all the countries through which the armies passed, suffered grievously; and those to whose succour they had hastened, were now left to desolation and destruction.

During these dreadful and unprofitable contests, were instituted the three famous military orders, which, after flourishing with such eminent dignity and wealth, are now nearly extinct, and reduced to the little isle of Malta and its knights, the history of which hardly enters into my province.

The attempts of the Christian monarchs of the West on Palestine, naturally awakened the enmity of the Mahomedans, and brought the severest sufferings on those who yet professed Christianity under the Saracenic governments. They justly suspected in every Greek and Latin a traitor; and probably often discovered their intrigues with their crusading brethren. The crusaders themselves, also, by their brutality to their enemies, provoked retaliation, and the sacrifices, though terrible, were just. Thus almost all the Eastern churches fell to the dust, and were buried in ruins, either by the ravages of their Christian brethren, or by the fire of their Mahomedan foes.

An. 1165. An event as inauspicious to the Christian name, produced in the north-east of Asia a catastrophe as grievous. The success of the Nestorian Christians had been raised to the highest

pitch by a Tartar chieftain, who had embraced the faith, and is supposed to have been ordained a presbyter, whence he is usually known by the name of PRESTER JOHN. He had seized a favourable moment, and extended greatly his dominions, and his fame had reached the Greek and Roman Emperors, to whom he had notified his faith and exploits. His successor continued under the same title, the protector of his Christian subjects. But the great conqueror of Asia, Genghiscawn, (AN. 1187.) overturned his throne, and over-ran his country, carrying destruction through China, India, Persia and Arabia, overwhelming alike Christians and Mahomedans with the same deluge of his Tartar horde, and establishing a new empire in the conquered provinces, in all which the Christian faith was greatly weakened by the ravages of the conquerors. Nor had the Northern regions of Europe ceased to afford calamitous instances of pagan cruelties, where their power prevailed, or their revolts led them to vent their rage on the missionaries and their flocks.

AN. 1126. Such afflictive events were little compensated by any new acquisitions to the Christian faith; for these were indeed of so suspicious a nature as hardly to be reckoned in the scale. Among these are numbered the conversions wrought by the zealous Boleslaus of Poland, who granted peace to the vanquished Pomeranians, on condition of embracing the gospel, and receiving the missionaries he sent; of whom the most eminent and successful was Albert, Bishop of

Bamberg. For in those days, there were not wanting bishops themselves, who were emulous of this honor.

An. 1168, Waldemar, the King of Denmark, displayed the like zeal among the pagan tribes on the Baltic, against whom he led his victorious armies. Every where he destroyed all monuments of idolatry, and by the terror of his chastisements, as much as by the zeal of the Archbishop of Lunden and his associates, compelled them to submit to the Christian faith and worship.

An. 1151. The Finlanders received their profession nearly by the same means. The sword of Eric, King of Sweden, and the zealous Archbishop of Upsal, who accompanied him in the expedition, bent their reluctant necks to the Christian yoke; under which impatient, and not yet tamed to submit to every prelatical imposition, an angry chieftain avenged a penance imposed by the too rigid missionary prelate, in his murder, conferring on him thereby the honors of martyrdom.

An. 1198. The Esthonians and Livonians were converted by the same effectual means. Mainard, a canon of St. Augustin, having penetrated the country with some merchants, attempted in vain the conversion of the natives. Mortified at the little attention paid to him, a new commission with the episcopat was conferred on him by Pope Urban III. and the zealous missionary bishop immediately levied an apostolic army to accomplish by the sword what he could not do by persuasion,

and baptising at the point of the spear, wrought wonders. His successors nobly followed so edifying an example, till a new military order of *knights sword bearers*, instituted by Pope Innocent III. for that express purpose, completed their conversion, and left scarce a pagan unbaptised. In return for which inestimable blessing, the bishops and clergy, with the knights, *only* seized every thing valuable into their own possession, and took the government, body and soul, of their greatly obliged, and certainly greatly humbled converts.

An. 1124—1154. The Sclavonians, still numerous, and very abhorrent of Christianity, called forth the military zeal of Henry, duke of Saxony, and the missionary labours of Vicelinus, consecrated Bishop of Oldenburg. He is said to be a man of most eminent excellence, and to have wrought wonderful conversions among them. I can only observe, that all these missionaries seem to have bishoprics in view, and princes with their power at their elbow; circumstances, which render the truth of their piety, and their Christian labours and real success, considerably suspicious.

Such acquisitions as these could hardly be called additions to the Christian pale. The converts changed their idols only for saints, and Friga for the Virgin; and they worshipped them nearly with the same ceremonies. Of the doctrines of revelation, they continued as ignorant as their lives were the reverse of the practice it enjoined, and herein their apostles themselves too frequently

kept them company: but they were all taught the sign of the cross—to make the proper genuflexions and salutations—were brought to pay tithes and oblations to the clergy—and to profess obedience to the see of Rome, the first article of the catholic creed of those days, and more essential than all the rest; and so far by the military power which accompanied them, and the lying miracles with which they imposed on these illiterate barbarians, they at last effectually prevailed. All bowed the knee to the Roman pontiff and his booted apostles.

The Saracens in Spain maintained their empire and their love of science, whilst their neighbours were exhausting themselves in distant expeditions, and leaving behind them the most beautiful countries in Europe under the Mahomedan yoke.

CHAPTER II.

THE INTERNAL STATE OF THE CHURCH.

THOUGH ignorance profound generally prevailed, there were in the East and West, men of genius and letters who still figured among the learned. The Greeks, ever superior to the Latins, produced writers of some eminence; and the patriarchs of Constantinople cultivated science, especially the Aristotelian philosophy, among their clergy, that they might be better able to dispute against their adversaries. But it must be acknowledged, that the famed Bishop Eustathius's comment upon Homer, far exceeds any similar comment on the Scriptures in that day.

The Western world attempted some revival of literature, and from the famous Saracenic schools, to which from England, as well as all parts of Europe, the desire of information brought a multitude of students, a number of doctors issued forth to enlighten their countrymen with the sciences: and academies were opened for teaching them in the principal cities. Among these the university of Paris was particularly famous, and surpassed the elder establishment at Oxford which Alfred is said to have founded, and which continued also to prosper greatly. Montpelier, Bologna, Salernum, were

severally renowned for law, physic and philosophy, and vied with each other in celebrity. The seven liberal sciences divided into the trivium, or three initiatory ones, grammar, rhetoric and logic, and the quadrivium, arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy, were now comprised under the name of philosophy; and theology, jurisprudence, and physic, were added to the circle: the latter were particularly taught in some schools, according to the learned profession which each student was designed to pursue.

An. 1137. The Arabians were the great masters of physic. From their universities the first elements of the science were derived: and the writings of their physicians particularly read. What gave a peculiar brilliancy to the study of jurisprudence was a casual discovery made at Almasi, in Italy, of the long lost pandect of the Emperor Justinian, containing all the Roman laws, which the inundations of barbarians had for ages buried in dust and oblivion, and supplanted by their several barbarous customs, and oral traditions; a diversity which rendered the administration of civil and criminal justice so very different in the various countries of Christendom. But no sooner had this ancient code appeared, than it was studied with avidity, and almost universally adopted as the rule of administration of justice. England being nearly singular in rejecting it, and adhering to her own common law and ancient customs.

An. 1130—1140. The Roman pontiffs, eager to seize every occasion of confirming and enlarging

their jurisdiction, immediately formed the scheme of modelling their ecclesiastical regimen on the plan of the admired pandect; and Gratian, a monk, under the patronage of Eugenius, produced that arrangement called *the decretals*, being a collection of pontifical edicts and canons, which mightily contributed to subject the world to the popish canon law, as to the Roman civil law; the study of both which was united, and tending greatly to enrich its professors and exalt the dominion of Rome over the Christian world, became a great favourite with the Pope and his partisans; it continues to this day, in a measure, in protestant as well as popish countries; and many of its absurd, debasing and tyrannical canons have been made the engines of oppression, and pointed against those who have risen up to witness against the abuses of popish and prelatical tyranny.

But though a revival was attempted in the republic of letters, and many set themselves with zeal to excel, we shall be sadly disappointed if we expect to meet with either experimental philosophy, or sound divinity. The method of tuition in the schools was still strangely absurd; and the matters which exercised the subtleties of disputation, and afforded fame to the combatants, were ridiculous and trifling beyond measure. Such we may reckon the great contests between the *realists* and *nominalists*; the subtle questions of scholastic theology, insignificant in their nature, and exciting an acrimony in their disputes, as disgraceful as the subjects disputed were contemptible. It would lead me too far to enter into the jargon of the schools;

I shall content myself with just producing the greatest and most admired theologian of the age, whose writings were abuadantly more studied than the Scriptures, and held in higher admiration.

An. 1164. Peter Lombard, so called from his country, produced a famous body of divinity, which gained him the eminent title of *master of the sentences*. So high was his reputation, that the greatest men of that day used his treatises as the text book of theological lectures, and wrote long and profound comments on the admired prelates performances. Lombard professed to comprize the whole circle of theology in four books. The first, of God and his mode of subsistence—the second of angels and men, their creation and fall; original and actual sin; grace and predestination—the third, of the incarnation of Christ, the gifts and graces of his spirit, and christian morals—the fourth, the nature of the sacraments, and the four last things. These all consisted of compilations from the fathers: and as *their* contradictions were endless, and their sentiments in many of these things diametrically opposite, the learned theologist laboured to reconcile them, and to form one uniform mass of catholic doctrine from the jarring elements. Whoever opens the book and reads a single page, will find abundance to exercise his risible muscles, and make him stand astonished at the imbecility of an age, that could admire and adopt such absurdities. The celebrated Bacon has left us a curious testimony of the veneration in which these works were held, and how much the apostles and

prophets, and the Scriptures of inspiration, were placed below the *master of the sentences*, and his divine works of theology. It is an address to Clement IV.

"The batchelor," says Bacon, "who reads the "Scripture, gives place to the reader of *the sen-* "*tences*, who every where, and among all, is "honoured and preferred. The reader of the sen- "tences has his choice of the most eligible time, "and holds a cell and society with the religious: "but the biblical reader has neither; and must "beg for such an hour as the reader of the senten- "ces is pleased to assign him. He who reads the "Lombardine thesis, may any where dispute and "be esteemed *a master*;—he who reads the text of "Scripture is admitted to no such honour. The "absurdity of this conduct is evident: to place in "so inferior a station the theological reader of the "sacred text, beneath him who reads the master "of the sentences."

AN. 1142. Of all the men famous in that day, next to Lombard, was ABELARD. Deeply versed in all the Aristotelian subtleties, he introduced them alike into philosophy and divinity, and produced a method of theological teaching, into which every vain question and curious speculation was introduced, and disputed with all the pomp of wisdom, the profundity of investigation, the immensity of genius, and the acrimony of passion. To these subtle doctors, and their theological schools, the youth of Europe attached themselves;

heard with wonder the depths of their unintelligible science, and took a fierce interest in the decision of these unmeaning controversies.

There were indeed adversaries who attempted greater simplicity, and affected higher spirituality. These were called *biblical divines*, as they confined themselves to the sacred oracles chiefly, and rejected all the miserable farrago of the schools. Whilst the *mystics*, abandoning themselves to an imagined inward light and teaching, looked for immediate impulses, and depended upon what they called illuminations of the spirit. These, though borne down by the superior multitude of their more profound theological brethren, maintained a long and stout war of polemic disputation; and council upon council became necessary to maintain the peace of the church against the violence of these opponents, and to bridle the licentious rage of disputing about intricate and dangerous theological opinions. Even Lombard fell under censure, and Abelard was condemned as an heretic: though the scholastic divinity still maintained its ground, and flourished till the days of the Reformation.

In this war of words, truth and godliness suffered alike. To be an acute disputant was much more coveted than to be an humble Christian; and victory, won by the most intricate subtleties of sophisms, crowned the warrior in the schools far beyond all the acquirements of the simplicity which is in Christ. The wisdom from above, which is pure, peaceable, easy to be intreated, full of good

fruits, without wrangling, and without hypocrisy, was in little request in that day. The most subtle in distinctions—the most violent in argument, and the most obstinate in perseverance, were esteemed the most elevated theologians. True religion was lost, not merely in endless forms and ceremonies of worship paid to saints and angels, multiplied without measure; but in a labyrinth of intricate questions, and an ignorance of divine principles and practice truly deplorable.

The manners of the clergy afforded the most encouraging ground of licentiousness to their flocks. Simony and concubinage, however sharply condemned, continued to prevail; and we have only to read the works of the famous St. Bernard, to know how deeply the monastic orders, as well as pontiffs and bishops, were sunk in profligacy and superstition. A stronger and more accurate expression cannot be formed, than the Scripture offers of the state of that miscalled *Christian* Church, "the great Whore which sitteth on the many waters." It is afflictive to dwell on these scenes: we will deplore, and pass them by.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH, CONTESTS, HERESIES, RITES AND CEREMONIES.

THE government of the Church in one despotic head, was the darling object pursued by all the Roman pontiffs. But the Constantinopolitan Patriarch still maintained his independence, if not his supremacy; and all the efforts of the Greek emperors, when their political interests compelled them to court the support of Rome, could not prevail over the clergy to submit to the Roman see. The attempts to reconcile the two great patriarchs only widened the breach. The Greeks fought hard for their own bishop, and would admit no pre-eminence or jurisdiction of the Latin prelate. In argument and learning the scale preponderated in favour of Constantinople; but power, wealth and numbers, were on the side of Rome. To this day the contest subsists.

One nearer home, and more important still, called forth the activity and all the intrigues of the papal see. The subject of *investitures* was again contested with all the arms of heaven and earth. The Pope having debauched an unnatural son to rebel against his gallant father, hoped, by dethroning his resolute foe, Henry the Fourth, and raising the

parricide and rebel to the empire, that his gratitude would concede the important point in dispute. He was mistaken; and the impious absolution granted to him and his subjects from allegiance to his father, failed of transferring it to the see of Rome. When seated firm on the throne, Henry V. asserted his rights against the papal claims, as vigorously as his dethroned father had done. An. 1110. The disappointed and exasperated pontiff renewed his decrees and anathemas, and Henry having appeased the disturbances and wars at home, began his march to humble the proud prelate, as cringing in the hour of danger, as insolent in the moment of prosperity. The matter was attempted to be accomodated when a new tumult at Rome provoked the Emperor to seize and imprison the trembling pontiff; An. 1111, and there extort from him the fullest concessions to obtain his liberty. But the spirit of the man was unchanged: the spirit of the Roman hierarchy unsubdued; the clamors of his clergy were violent, the agreement was disannulled; and a new council called, in which the Pope lamented his fallibility and error, and again deprived the Emperor of the right of investitures. His excommunication followed. This terrible sentence against the heretic who might rebel, and murder his father with impunity, shook the pillars of the throne which he had usurped. The princes of Germany revolted: his own people were ready to withdraw their allegiance. Just vengeance roused the spirit of the Emperor against his former patron, Pascal. The Pope fled on his approach, and endeavouring to engage

his Norman auxiliaries to recover his royal seat of Rome, he finished his days amidst these military preparations. A schism in the popedom followed. Calixtus the second, a man of temper, endeavored after sharp conflicts with the Anti-pope, to heal the breach, and by yielding to the Emperor the point of right and regality, but changing the mode of investiture to save the honour of the see, the peace of the Church was restored. An. 1122.

An. 1155—1177. But this peace was not long after disturbed by a fresh schism in the papacy, The contests of pride and ambition in the Church are a mortifying subject. At Rome we find nothing else. One breach is scarcely healed before a wider is opened. The dispute was revived by the Pope, Adrian II. with the Emperor Frederic I. and insolence prevailing, the Emperor after years of contests with succeeding popes, was compelled to humble himself to the proud pontiff, Alexander III. The same domineering prelate attempted to interfere in the English government; displeased with some statutes, enacted at Clarendon, which brought the clergy under responsibility to the law. An. 1164. Becket, the archbishop, and partisan of the Roman see, after the most insufferable acts of insolence against the king, though treated with a condescension of which he was unworthy, continuing during the king's absence in France, his prelatical arrogance against the established laws, suffered by the hands of assassins; and though the king in no measure countenanced the deed, yet having in an irritated state expressed his indigna-

tion against that monster of ingratitude, he was charged with abetting his murder, and compelled to secure the peace of his kingdom by submitting to an humiliating penance. Whilst Becket, who deserved to be hanged as a traitor, was canonised among the first of English saints: and his altar attended with more oblations than even the Virgin Mary, or Christ himself. AN. 1173.

AN. 1179. A third Lateran council confirmed and enlarged the papal jurisdiction. From Rome, indeed, what could flow but tyranny? The mode of election to the tiara was unchangeably fixed—heretics were to be proceeded against with fire and sword—and as the gainful trade of canonization, and the sale of indulgencies increased, these, with other greater causes such as creating kingdoms, and conferring titles on their monarchs, were in future wholly to be confined to the papal see.

As nothing promised a more lucrative branch of trade than the sale of indulgencies, these were peculiarly monopolised by the politic pontiffs. The bishops had supposed themselves possessed of the right of granting exemption from the penalties imposed by the church on transgressors, and commuting the punishment for money, to be applied to charitable uses. The popes, who claimed to be alone entitled to apply the keys to the Church's treasury *of works of supererogation*, proceeded one step farther, and assumed authority of exempting the offender not only from all *ecclesiastic punishment*, but from *all suffering for sin in an eternal world*—

a prerogative which gave infinitely greater value to the indulgence, which in that case could never be purchased too dearly.

From such corruption in the head what could be expected in the members, but just what is recorded. The grossest frauds, the profoundest ignorance, and dissolution of manners without a covering. The monkish orders attempted to be reformed by the Abbot of Clugni, maintained not the austerity of their rules, amidst the wealth and possessions heaped upon them. The Cistertians, their rivals for public estimation, supported by the great St. Bernard and from him called Bernardins, rose high in repute for sanctity. Jealousy produced quarrels and mutual criminations, and a dispute about a grant of exemption from tythes was prosecuted with the sharpest animosity.

The canons, who now taught the public schools, rising in veneration and attracting liberal donations, awakened the envy and enmity of the monkish orders; and bitter disputes for pre-eminence marked the kind of Christianity for which they contended.

Where so much was to be got, the hot-bed of monachism produced a plenteous crop of new orders, of Fontevraud, Premontré, Carmelites, &c. one of which began with a single jack-ass, and in a very short space of time possessed a thousand abbeys, three hundred provostships, innumerable priories, and five hundred nunneries. But none for antiquity dared contest with the Carmelites; the disciples of the prophet Elijah, their patron

and founder, and ever since his days inhabitants of Mount Carmel; affirming that from his bald head the clerical tonsure was derived. It required, indeed, an age of folly to swallow frauds so gross, and pretensions so ridiculous. But from the trifling contentions of monks, for wealth and preeminence, we turn to greater among the Greeks, in which the Emperor himself entered the polemic lists, "Whether the incarnate God was at once "offerer and oblation?" "What was the meaning "of the words of Christ, "My father is greater "than I?" in which the royal disputant employed the argumentum baculinum, against those doctors who presumed to differ from his opinion, by depriving them of their honours and benefices, and by denunciations of death.

The Latins had yet a wide field for controversy in the various sentiments held respecting the body of Christ in the Eucharist; which Rupert revived, with other disputed opinions, concerning the *effects of the divine will*. But a more important matter was long and hard fought by the several partisans, respecting "*the immaculate conception of the Virgin*:" to which a festival had been consecrated by the church of Lyons. AN 1140. St. Bernard disputed strongly the truth of the fact; but the current of superstition here ran against the saint, sufficiently credulous; and the Virgin Mary stood so high in the favour of the Christian populace, that every thing derogatory to her honour, was treated as the highest blasphemy. The conception immaculate, and the festival, with all its rites and ceremo-

nies appurtenant, were therefore established with a high hand. The new forms of worship invented, and the multiplied additions to the old, exercised the brightest geniuses and greatest characters of the age, each seeking for himself a name, in his superabundant devotion, and veneration for the saints and their relics, the holy images and the virgin; with all the motley farrago of lights, crucifixes, vestments, incense, and genuflexions.

Respecting the heresies of this century, the ancient ones seem to have been forgotten, and others of a different kind awakened the enmity, and excited the persecution of the ecclesiastical powers. In the East, and in the West, the enormous wealth, insufferable pride, and evil examples of the priesthood, revolted many; and the faithful witnesses against the abuses of the clergy, and the superstitious practices of the age, were sure to be loaded with every calumny. The accusations against these reformers, charged with multiplied heresies, and heightened by all the bitterness of malevolence, are always to be heard with caution and just suspicion. Lying for the honour of the Church, had long since been sanctioned by the authority of some of the fathers, as no evil, but rather meretorious. Indeed, in these days of ignorance and superstition the very opposition formed against the scandalous impositions of the ecclesiastics, would be apt to lead men into the opposite extremes, and to out-reform reformation. Hence, perhaps, some things truly blameable, were chargeable upon those, who, on the whole, were the excellent of

the earth, and sincerely meant the honor of the Christian name.

Such were the Euchites, or *praying men*, in the East. Abhorrent of the formality and superstitions around them, they gave themselves up to prayer and contemplation. They seem to have been either a branch of the *mystics*, many of whom in silence and secret worshipped God; or more probably of the *Paulicians*, as they were charged, like them, with Manichean heresies; but their most revolting crime was their dislike of the priestly power and arrogance.

The *Bogomiles*, seem to be of the same race, as their name signifies, *criers for mercy*. Their leader was put to death, but his followers remained. Various heretical opinions, and fanatic practices, are imputed to them.

In the West a multitude of sectaries arose, holding a mixture of truth and error; wishing a reformation of many things in the Church, and giving occasion to their adversaries to charge them with errors and practices as blameable as those which they condemned.

The Cathari, or Puritans, said to be a branch of the Paulicians, excited the bitterness, abuse, and persecution of the abbot Bernard, Evervinus, and Egbert. They were widely diffused through the south of France, Piedmont, Flanders and Milan. Many things are laid to their charge by their bigot enemies which they knew not; more are misrepre-

sented: but from their own shewing, even by the testimony of their persecutors, in doctrine they were as sound as in conduct exemplary. If, in emerging from darkness, some mistakes mingled with the truths they held; if poor, and generally illiterate, they were less able to leave defences of their own tenets and practices; the representations of their adversaries are to be weighed with the more caution; but even these furnish abundant arguments for their excellence. Their rigid austerity is among their crimes; few were equal, it is said, to the demands of the most perfect class; into that the rest of the fraternity were only admitted on their dying beds. Most of the following, esteemed heretics, were probably of the same denomination.

An. 1120. Peter de Bruys, in Provence, was at the head of the sect called from him Petrobrusians. He inveighed against the vices and superstitions of the times, and boldly attacked the ecclesiastical tyranny and abuses of Rome as anti-christian. The enraged clergy stirred up the populace, and he was burnt alive, not judicially, but in a tumult, raised by the priests. Indeed, had he been heard, the most profitable articles of their trade had been utterly depreciated; as he denied the efficacy of indulgencies, and affirmed, that the prayers or oblations of the living, could be of no avail to the dead—he asserted also, that the body of Christ was only in the Eucharist in *figure*, not *reality*—that crucifixes, and all the objects of superstitious devotion, were abominable—that churches had no

peculiar sanctity, but that God might every where be served acceptably by his spiritual worshippers. These, and other like tenets, highly offensive to the priesthood, he maintained with such zeal, some say enthusiasm, as brought him to his untimely end. But the conviction of the truths which he preached did not die with him.

An. 1147. A monk and hermit of Lausanne, named Henry, turned itinerant, and went about declaiming powerfully against the clergy, their vices and superstitions. St. Bernard encountered and routed the impertinent reformer; and seized by Pope Eugenius the third, he was condemned in a council at Rheims, and consigned to a prison, where he quickly ended his sufferings.

An. 1115. A more exceptionable character, whether a lunatic or impostor, at Antwerp, is said to have given himself out as the Son of God. What he really taught is difficult to know, amidst the monstrous and improbable absurdities laid to his charge. Certain it is, he inveighed fiercely against the pride and scandals of the clergy, and was murdered by a furious ecclesiastic. But his followers survived him.

An. 1139. Arnold, of Brescia, occasioned more tumult and disturbances. Condemned by Pope Innocent II. he retired for a while; but returning to Rome, in the next pontificate, he stirred up that people, always disposed to revolt against their lordly masters; and after causing much sedition, was seized, crucified, and burnt. His endeavour

to strip the clergy of their possessions, and to reduce them to a moderate subsistence from the people, was high treason against the Church, and punished accordingly. Yet he left a spirit that burned for reformation, though suppressed by the strong arm of power.

An. 1160. But the most zealous and successful reformer of the age, was Peter Waldus or Valdus, a name derived from those whose principles he had adopted. He had been a merchant of Lyons, but imbibing from the Waldenses a taste for the Scriptures, he procured a priest to translate for him the four gospels, with other books of the New Testament, into French. The diligent perusal of these, not only opened his eyes to the reigning errors and profligate manners of the clergy, but animated him with holy zeal. He quitted his profession, distributed his whole substance to the poor, and forming congregations who embraced his opinions, he began boldly to preach and teach the doctrines of vital Christianity, and to remonstrate against the ignorance and vices of the age, An. 1180. The archbishop of Lyons and his clergy, fired at these reproaches, endeavoured to silence this new apostle. But the purity of his life, the disinterested charity he displayed, the simplicity of truth which he taught, and the zeal with which he enforced his exhortations, awakened deep concern in many, and procured him a number of faithful associates and fellow labourers. These formed numerous societies in France, Italy, and throughout Europe. Nor could the most furious perse-

cutions raised against them, or the murders committed upon them by the anathemas of the Church, depress their courage or reduce them to silence.

The doctrines which these taught, and the practices they recommended, were generally such as the Protestants have since adopted; with the exception of some few things, which they seem to have carried to extremes, as is too frequently the case with all, who, sore under the feeling of former abuses, have not learned to moderate the rigor of reform by the true apostolic model.

They admitted the established orders of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, though under a different name; but they supposed they must be men dead to the world, and destitute of wealth, earning by some honest occupation their own bread, without burdening the congregation. They regarded the riches which had been poured in upon the Church, as one of the chief sources of its corruption. They little esteemed the scientific pursuits or scholastic theology in vogue, preferring for the ministry the men of the most devoted zeal and exemplary piety, to all the learning of the schools. They supposed every man of the congregation, who possessed ability, and felt himself so disposed, might exhort and pray, confirming the hearts of the disciples. They denied all efficacy of relics, prayers, penances to procure pardon for sin, which God through Christ alone could bestow. They asserted, that confession to a priest was useless, as any enlightened brother could equally advise and admonish: they regarded with horror the idea of purchased

dispensations and indulgencies, as the fraud of sacerdotal avarice. They rejected all the *penetentiaries*, and their absurd prescriptions; and desired that the simple ancient discipline in every congregation, should be restored. They despised all services for the dead as useless; regarded the purgatorial fire as a chimera, designed only to rob the credulous; and affirmed, that the state of departed spirits was irrevocably fixed for hell or heaven the moment of their departure from the body. They renounced all dependence upon saints and martyrs, the crucifix, or the Virgin, and only trusted upon the finished redemption of Jesus Christ for life and salvation.

Their Christian walk was remarkably circumspect. In some particulars they seem to have mistaken the directory of our Saviour, which they professed in all things to follow. But their very errors had an amiable object in them, which, if we cannot vindicate, we shall easily forgive. To all the generally received duties of gospel obedience, they added the unlawfulness of wars of any kind—they forbade all self-defence and law-suits—they refused oaths of every sort—questioned the right of putting the most criminal to death—and condemned all accumulation of wealth. They were not entirely united in all their opinions, which some carried much farther than others. Some supposed the Church of Rome a true Church, though greatly departed from original simplicity; others regarded her as wholly apostate, and doomed in the head and members unto wrath to the uttermost. Some imposed on

themselves peculiar self-denial in meat, drink, clothing, prayer, and fasting: others, esteemed less perfect, conformed to the general customs in matters of indifference, but with the utmost simplicity and frugality, avoiding every appearance of pride, ostentation, or luxury. Indeed, their laborious, industrious habits engaged them nearly to approach each other, with very little inequality of wealth or station. Wisdom and superior piety alone, seem to have conferred pre-eminence.

Besides these poor and despised followers of Waldus, who wonderfully multiplied through France, Switzerland and Italy, a variety of absurd and fanatical sects arose from the fermenting corruption of the age. The *Pasagini*, who used circumcision, and were half judaical. The *Caputiati*, who bore on their caps an image of the Virgin, and pretended to level all mankind to primitive equality by the abolition of all distinctions of men in Church and State. The *Apostolics*, who professed to be purely apostolical, poor, laborious, illiterate, bearded, and living in celibacy, though accompanied by a female sister, with whom they did not cohabit. *Eon*, a madman, gave himself out as the *Son of God*, and drew a multitude of disciples after him. He was condemned by the Pope, as a heretic, to perpetual imprisonment, when he should have been put under medical care for recovery.

The suppression of all these was the object of clerical jealousy and persecution. Many of them fell before the victorious arguments of St. Bernard,

the censures of the Church, and the sword of the civil power. But others took deep root and spread; for, as is often the case, the zeal of the reformers was but sharpened by the sufferings to which they were exposed. Highly as I respect a late ecclesiastical historian, I am astonished at his attempt to enrol Bernard in his catalogue of evangelical religion. *Saint*, added to such a name, would be impious. However orthodox some of his sentiments may be, can false miracles, lying prophecies, bloody persecutions of the faithful, and servitude to the papacy and her dominion, constitute a saint of the first water! A protestant divine disgraces his page by these commendations, and renders even the truths, which he supports and contends for as evangelical, suspicious. *Non tali auxilio aut defensoribus istis opus egit.* He might have found nobler champions than the superstitious, fraudulent, bitter, and bloody Abbot of Clairval.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TRUE SPIRITUAL CHURCH OF CHRIST.

WHEN abuses are advancing to the extreme, they frequently produce their own reform. Such was the case at present. The exorbitant wealth and extravagant pretensions of the clergy, awakened the attention of many; and some more zealous than the rest, and more intelligent and inquisitive, began to read the Scriptures, and discover the multitude of prevailing abuses, and boldly to remonstrate against them. These were branded with a variety of opprobrious names by their bigotted adversaries, as Manicheans, Paulicians, Cathari, &c.

Among these, under their faithful leader, Peter, the Waldenses, who had long subsisted in the Pais de Vaud, from whence they had their name of Vaudois and Valdenses, were the most distinguished. Some suppose the name derived from an eminent teacher named Waldo, a cotemporary, and associate with Berengarius. Certain it is, from the testimony of their inquisitorial enemies, as well as their friends, that they had subsisted for centuries past in the vales of Piedmont. They are said by Maestricht to have written against the errors of popery before the year 1000; and by Poplienerus, to have been diffused widely over

the Western world. They were condemned as "damnable heretics" by Alexander the IIId, at the synod of Tours, in the year 1163, and said to have been long since spread through the district of Toulouse. After all the havoc made by the bloody inquisitors, they continued so numerous, that the archbishops of Aix, of Arles, and of Narbonne, informed the Pope that it was impossible to build prisons sufficiently capacious to hold the heretics, or to procure them food, and therefore desired his holiness to advise what should be done. "All "these," says Mezeray, "held almost the same "opinions as those who are now called Calvinists." From France they crossed the seas into England; and as appears by the persecution which was raised against them by Henry II. and his popish bishops, had widely diffused their doctrine, and become objects of prelatical odium, AN. 1160. Clark, in his Martyrology, records about twenty eminent witnesses in England before Wickliff, and observes, that, "though many times the saints of God were "compelled to hide themselves, and underwent "grievous persecutions, yet he still preserved a "seed alive, to bear witness against the anti-"christian corruptions." Thus in many lands the seeds of gospel truth and future reformation were dispersed: and henceforth the persecutions raised against them, demonstrate the wide spreading contagion of what the enemies of true Christianity branded as heresy. From their increasing numbers, and their attempts to stem the torrent of superstition, they grew into observation; and though inferior in rank, comparatively few, prophesying

in sack-cloth, and exposed to every insult and suffering, it was evident the Lord had not forsaken the earth, nor left himself without witnesses.

And not only among these, and others which have been mentioned, was a holy seed preserved, but in the East, it is to be hoped, that many yet served God in spirit and in truth, whether under the denomination of Mystics, Paulicians or Nestorians. And in the Greek Church, amidst the general degeneracy, some of the poor of the flock probably were preserved from the prevailing ignorance and superstitions, escaping like Job with the skin of their teeth.

The disputes that were afloat, however ridiculous and unprofitable many of them might be, kept enquiry awake, and called for investigation of the fathers, and sometimes at least of the sacred records, and if borne down by numbers, and deterred by danger, many in silence, or among a few of their confidential friends held the truth, in the light and the love of it, here and there, both in the East and West, a daring spirit ventured to promulge, what he believed to be true and important; and suffered for the testimony he bore.

It is evident in France, England, Switzerland, Lombardy, Moravia and Bohemia, there was still a poor and scattered people, who dared to be singular; and probably throughout the Christian world a generation of a like spirit might be found, though their obscurity of station, dispersion, and fewness in number, brought them not into obser-

vation, nor exposed them to such persecution as would render them objects of history. The true kingdom of God cometh not with the outward parade of human greatness: it is not of this world; it is hid with Christ in God, and so probably will be to the end of time; until the glory of the latter day shall produce a general and blessed diffusion of gospel truth and power throughout the world, and usher in the reign of grace and righteousness, when the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ.

CENTURY XIII.

CHAPTER I.

PROGRESS OF THE OUTWARD CHURCH

FRESH scenes of blood disfigure the face of the Christian world. The Roman pontiffs had reaped so many advantages from the zeal of the crusaders, that they pertinaciously adhered to these holy expeditions, from which they had so abundantly filled their coffers by donations, or purchases of those who emigrated, or from the indulgencies and absolutions granted to others, who in a fit of zeal having crossed themselves, chose to stay at home, and reap the benefits without sharing the toil and danger. It had been sufficiently condemnable to have turned their weapons unprovoked against the Saracenic hosts; but when the same crusading rage is directed against Christian brethren under the pretence of heresy, and murder sanctioned under the name of zeal for truth, horror stiffens at the sight, and waits to see the divine vengeance inflicted, when to those who are drunk with the blood of the saints, God will give them blood to drink.

The declining, or rather desperate state of the Christian Church in Palestine, roused the zeal of Innocent III. and the trumpet was again blown,

that the European princes and people might fly to the succour of the holy city. But their zeal had been frozen up by the ill success of past efforts, and they turned a deaf ear to the Pontiff's call. A few animated French nobles, leagued with the Venetians, and stimulated by the holy father, roused themselves to the battle; but they stopped short in their career, An. 1203. Ambitious candidates for the throne of Constantinople, tempted them on their march to turn aside, and the swords sharpened for the necks of the Saracens, were died in the best blood of Greece, An. 1204. Twice the city of Constantinople was taken; that decaying empire rent in twain; a Grecian and a Latin emperor contending for dominion; whilst the Mahomedans were ready to fall upon both, alike weakened by their divisions. During this conflict of more than fifty years, till Michael Palæologus recovered his imperial city, these Christians, instead of falling on their foes, devoured one another. An. 1261.

An. 1217. A new crusade was therefore urged by a succeeding pontiff, Honorius, and an army levied under Andrew, king of Hungary, and many princes of the empire and Italy; but the general in chief returned to Europe; and after a gleam of success, destruction from famine and the sword lost Damietta, the fortress which they had gained, and the army mouldered into dust.

An. 1223. These miseries and misfortunes cooled not the zeal of the Pope and his legates, whose gain bore a proportion with the crusaders losses.

Frederic the IId. the German emperor, enlisted under the banner of the Cross, at the instigation of the holy see; but detained by domestic difficulties, he deferred from time to time the execution of the project, which he had truly at heart; till the stimulus of papal excommunication launched against him by Gregory IX. accelerated his motions, AN. 1227; though he appears to have highly resented the papal insolence, and in a letter to the king of England, Henry the Third, charged that audacious see with just criminations of avarice, ambition, hypocrisy, and pretensions, against which every crowned head should be on their guard. The expedition of Frederic was successful. His force awed the sultan of Egypt; and he obtained without bloodshed, by treaty, and a truce for ten years, what the others had sought by arms in vain. Crowned king of Jerusalem, with great pomp, he returned to Italy to appease the discords which the ambition of Rome had fomented in his absence, AN. 1229; and instead of the flattering reception he justly hoped, he met the most insolent reproaches from the Pope and his partisans, whose schemes of aggrandisement he thus disappointed.

AN. 1239. At the expiration of the truce, the Pope sounded the tocsin. Theobald, king of Navarre, and many French and German nobles, embarked in two fresh expeditions, both of which ended in confusion; chiefly owing to divisions between the Knights Templars, and the Knights of Jerusalem, fomented by the perfidious prelate of Rome in opposition to the emperor, whose party

in Palestine he wished to weaken. Richard, Earl of Cornwall, followed with as ineffectual efforts, and an inglorious truce was all he could obtain. An. 1241.

An. 1248. The king of France, St. Lewis, a title dearly earned by crusading folly, in consequence of a vow made on occasion of his recovery from a dangerous illness, sailed for Egypt at the head of a numerous army, with all the benedictions and assurance of success which Rome could bestow; but, alas! the same scene was renewed; a momentary success was followed by famine, pestilence and defeat; the king himself, his two brothers, and all his army were taken prisoners by the Saracens, and compelled to ransom himself by a sum of money, which his kingdom could with difficulty produce, and to which the Pope contributed not a livre; leaving behind him in the sands of Egypt the corpses of his numerous host, and out of two thousand eight hundred knights of illustrious fame who accompanied him, only one hundred saw their native land again. The desolation and impoverishment which this caused in the kingdom of France must have been deplorable; and the state of Christianity in the East more desperate than ever.

An. 1270. Lewis, superstitious as valiant, and elevated by the commendations of the pontiff for his zeal towards the Catholic church, meditated the recovery of his blasted fame, by a renewed expedition against the infidels; and chusing Africa for the scene of his conquests, sailed for the bay

of Tunis, hoping to reduce to the Christian obedience, that vanquished and apostate country, and to recover the treasures he had expended; but the same calamities overwhelmed him. Pestilence devoured more than the sword, and he died inglorious on the bed of disease; his army reduced—his conquests abandoned, and the remnant glad to retire to their own coasts, and leave the victorious Saracens masters of the East. Thus ended these miserable and fanatic crusades, with the loss of millions of men; the desolation of the countries which were the scenes of conflict—the impoverishment of Europe—and the disgrace as well as destruction of all who engaged in them. The last of the Eastern possessions, Ptolemais, yielded to the Mahomedan yoke before the end of the century, and the smallest vestige of the Christian power was obliterated. AN. 1291.

It is shocking to reflect on these expeditions to which the Christian zeal seems to have been peculiarly directed by the craft of the see of Rome. The liberal and plenary indulgencies granted to the warriors, engaged the most profligate to earn the remission of their sins, and secure a certainty of Heaven, by enlisting under the banners of the Cross. Their lives continued the same, and the records of their abominations remain. Their friends suffered from them as much as their enemies, and they were nearly as much dreaded by those whom they came to defend, as by those they meant to conquer. The turbulent passions of ambition fermented in every bosom; and the Popes always

jealous of the Emperors, and seeking to exalt themselves, fomented by their intrigues and their legates, the divisions, which proved more fatal than the arms of the Saracens; disappointed the best concerted enterprises, and defeated the most prosperous commencements. To this chiefly is the ruin of the Christian cause to be imputed, which never should have been supported by weapons of this warfare; but God justly thus punished wicked and false Christians by their own hands and their own devices.

The Northern pagans had not yet wholly submitted. The barbarous Prussians obstinately retained the worship of their gods. As missionary zeal was either intimidated or proved to be vain; more effectual methods were pursued by Conrad, duke of Massovia, and the knights of the Teutonic Order, who, driven from Palestine, were still ready to fight the battles of the Church against all infidels, An. 1230. A long and bloody war followed. The superiority of military skill at last vanquished pagan valour; and those who would not be baptised in blood, were compelled to submit to the water of baptism and the sign of the Cross. Livonia is said to have received the same treatment, and its inhabitants became good Christians, and obedient to the Roman see, for that was now the essence of Christianity.

Spain, long flourishing under the dominion of the Caliphs, divided into principalities, and weakened by quarrels among themselves, became an easier

conquest to their former masters. The Christians rallied under their leaders; conquest after conquest, Castile, Arragon and Navarre, reduced the Saracenic territories, and prepared for the fall of Valentia, Grenada and Murcia, which yet remained to their former possessors. AN. 1236. Those who after many efforts to convert them, refused to return to the Christian pale, were by the unchristian influence of Clement IV. compelled to abandon their country, and leave those fruitful fields which their industry cultivated, a desert; and such they remain unto this day.

Nor were the desolations of the Christian name in Asia scarcely less afflictive: though traces still remained of Nestorian zeal in China and Tartary. The Mogul masters now become Mahomedans, oppressed them, but employed not the bloody means which Christians used with Christians; they put them under tribute, they proposed to them every allurement to apostatize, but they neither burnt nor dragooned them, as their own brethren in the West were doing.

The rising hosts of rebels against the holy see alarmed the pontiffs, more than all the conquests of the Saracens, and therefore against them during this century the weapons of war, ecclesiastical and civil, were particularly sharpened. It would be too extensive a field to recount all the persons, names and sects that called forth the Roman fury. The heaveist weight fell upon the south of France, where, under the general title of Albigenses and

Waldenses, were comprised all who resisted the claims of papal dominion, and refused to comply with the imperious dictates of its pontiff, or wished reformation in the church, both in its head and members. Raymond VI. of Toulouse, in whose territory this heresy was supposed to prevail, in vain attempted to ward off destruction from himself by embracing the papal party, AN. 1209: blood and massacres ruined his country, and Montfort, who had the honor, or rather the disgrace conferred on him, of executing the papal decrees against these heretics, AN. 1215, zealously accomplished the mandates of his bloody employers, that he might gain the dominions of Raymond as his reward; with which he was solemnly invested for his support of the cause of God and the Church; but the struggle ended not with the death of the first combatants. Another Raymond, and another Earl of Montfort renewed the conflict, and the great king of France, Lewis VIII. engaged by the solicitations and promises of the Pope, AN. 1229, cast his enormous weight into the scale against the poor persecuted Christians; and he and the Pope divided the spoil of the vanquished count of Toulouse. The inquisition, established in this capital, piously laboured to extirpate by fire and imprisonment, the remains of the pretended heretical crew. The plea was heresy, but the real moving cause was ambition, pride, and avarice. Yet after thousands upon thousands sacrificed on the Romish altar of Moloch, by inquisitors filled with every demoniacal principle of cruelty and hatred, the cause had

taken too deep root to be extirpated; and though suppressed in one part broke out in another, till the happy day of reformation came, and the tyger no longer permitted to ravin as before, was chained, and now through mercy his teeth are drawn and his claws so pared, that though still permitted to occupy his den, he is become despised and contemptible, and his end approaching; and old as I am, I hope to live to see the scripture fulfilled—"Rejoice over her ye Heavens, &c." Rev. xviii. 20.

NOTE.—*It is scarce two years since this expectation was expressed. The events which have since happened have hastened the period with a rapidity then little expected.*

CHAPTER II.

THE INTERNAL STATE OF THE CHURCH.

THE desolations without were great, but the disorders within were greater. The Eastern patriarch, like the sun in a mist, shorn of his beams, saw his greatness decline with the empire; whilst in the West, the Roman pontiff, *sitting in the temple of God, shewed himself as God*: assuming and exercising as far as circumstances admitted, universal authority, and rising in the full splendor of majesty over all persons and causes supreme.

The maxim established by the Popes and their partisans, was, that, "all governors, civil and ec- "clesiastical, derived all lawful authority from the "Roman see, and its Pontiff, as Christ's vicegerent "upon earth." Emperors and bishops were alike to be subject to their controul, and all ecclesiastical benefices might be disposed of by them of their proper right. But the monarchs being not quite passive either in Germany, France or England, these lordly claims were rejected; and though a thousand encroachments were submitted to in an hour of weakness, they struggled hard to preserve their regalities, and to repress the overwhelming pretensions of the supposed successors of the fisherman of Galilee. The *pragmatic sanction* of Lewis the Ninth, erected a barrier against this tyranny of

Rome, and provided for the liberties of the Gallician Church, as the statutes of Clarendon had done before for the British; but the artful and imperious legates, seconding their ambitious masters, seized every occasion, and improved every opportunity to carry into effect their most insolent pretensions. They made no scruple, when they dared, of violating the privileges of the chapters and churches, intruding upon them their own creatures, or those who had bribed them; and overawing their opposers with the terrors of excommunication, they plundered the people by the basest pretences, and shamefully trafficked with relics and indulgences, to support their own enormous vices, and to furnish their lordly masters with the treasure of the universe, the base tribute paid by credulity to fraud and arrogance. AN. 1268.

The pontiffs themselves, improving the moment of opportunity, when contests between the pretenders to the imperial throne, gave them peculiar importance, sold their suffrage for valuable acquisitions; or for connivance at the seizures, which they thought it convenient for them to make. Thus Ancona, Spoleto, Assisi, and many other cities of Italy, were reduced under their dominion; and Rodolph, of Hapsburgh, was not permitted to receive the imperial crown till he had confirmed all former gifts made to the holy see, and sanctioned all its later robberies.

AN. 1278. From their high and lofty place they conferred royalty on such as they favoured; a king of Bohemia, of Bulgaria, of Armenia, obtained

their regal titles from his holiness Innocent III. and Peter, of Arragon, received from the Pope's hand at Rome, his crown and dignity in return for subjecting his dominions to the papal see.

And their wrath was terrible, as their favour was supreme. The thunders of excommunication were successively hurled by the same Innocent, against the Emperors Philip and Otho; and for a domestic quarrel between man and wife, against Augustus, king of France, whom he compelled to take back his repudiated queen.

But none received such insulting treatment as John, the king of England. He had despised the Pope's interference and insolent attempt to impose upon the realm, as Archbishop of Canterbury, Langton, his creature; but an interdict first, and then the terrible excommunication shook the pillars of his throne. Nor did Innocent rest here, but after absolving the subjects of John from their oath of allegiance, he had the audacity, in a council of cardinals and bishops, to depose the British monarch, and bestow the crown on the French King, who was invited to execute the sentence, and take possession of the papal fief. AN. 1212. Fortified with every indulgence granted to the holy crusaders, the Dauphin of France with his army, prepared to enter England. Pandulph, the legate, seized the moment of triumph, when the turbulence of the barons, and the dread of the approaching crusaders wrought upon the fears of the coward monarch; and meanly humbling himself, he laid

his crown at this proud prelate's feet, who retained it five days, and then restored it to the worthless wearer, as a favour from Rome, held on the payment of 1000 marks a year to his pontifical superior. AN. 1213. One is as much amazed at the audacity which could presume on such an outrage, as at the pusillanimity which could submit to it.

Though crossed for the Holy Land, this defended not Frederic II. from the thunders of the Vatican; and when his victorious return demanded every token of gratitude, he found the treacherous Pontiff had watched the moment of his absence to seize upon Apuglia, and stir up the European powers against him. His presence defeating the Pope's ambitious projects, a short reconciliation was succeeded by renewed fulminations. AN. 1227. Frederic now defended his right by arms, and his character by confutations of the lying prelate, whom he pressed hard: but the imperious haughtiness of Gregory brooked not submission. A council of cardinals and prelates was summoned to depose the valiant and deserving head of the empire; and arms and allies prepared to execute the sentence; but all was defeated by the vigour of Frederic, who seized the fleet, conveying the bishops and their treasure to Rome; interrupted the council: and confounded all the malice of his adversary; who sickening with rage, vexation and disappointment, ended his miserable days, AN. 1241.

AN. 1244. His successor, with equal haughtiness, renewed the sentence of excommunication, deposed

lives forming the strongest contrast with the clergy, whom they reviled, drew away crowds of disciples after them, and threatened more general defection. This new order therefore renouncing all possessions, begging their daily bread from door to door, coarsely clad, and girt with a rope; some barefooted, and all affecting sanctity of the highest cast, filled the world. Favoured by the Pontiffs, for whom all their zeal was exhausted, and on whom they depended, the extirpation of heresy, and the support of the papal power, were their grand objects. These, multiplying like locusts upon the earth, were divided into four great bodies of Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, and Hermits of St. Augustin. The two former being the great communities, and by their mutual jealousy of superiority provoking bitter animosities and quarrels, on them I shall chiefly dwell.

The influence which these beggars obtained, it is impossible to tell. Seduced by their sanctimonious appearance, their meritorious poverty, and the favour of the Roman pontiffs, the world bowed down before them; their cord bound men as with links of iron, and kings and prelates trembled. Entrusted generally with absolution and indulgences, they became the spiritual guides universally, and engrossed by degrees all power, and all employments.

But as their chief object was heresy, against this was all their zeal concentred; and abundant occasion arose for its exercise, as heresy had then

taken a new form, and was applied not so much to those who perverted the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, as to all who presumed to censure any of the abuses of the Romish Church, and to expose the insolence, pride, and ambition of its pontiffs; in whose dictates all truth was supposed to be found, and to doubt or dispute their decisions was *mortal* sin, and made the offender liable to every torment. The bloody Dominic, a Spaniard, was at the head of one of these begging fraternities. A man suited by nature for an inquisitor; acute, violent, unfeeling, overbearing, indefatigable. AN. 1206. He set out for France, the focus of heresy, and with his begging associates, preached, caressed, threatened, promised; and those whom he could not prevail upon by the eloquence of his discourses, he subdued by the terrors of the secular arm, leagued to destroy these presumptuous advocates for reformation. On his return to Italy, accumulated honours from the papal see stimulated afresh his zeal, and those of his fraternity. Reduced by him to the strictest rules of poverty and obedience, a numerous host enlisted under his banners; they were, from their leader, named Dominicians, from their labours, *preaching friars*, and from their garb, *black friars*; a place where they first settled in London, at their coming to England, still retains their name.

AN. 1233. To this black and bloody regiment was chiefly entrusted the inquisitorial work: and for the benefit of their souls, men's bodies were committed to the flames. Wherever a place was

suspected of heresy, a court of these blood-hounds was erected, with powers which none dared resist; to hunt out, examine, condemn, and extirpate all those who presumed to find fault with Rome or her minions. Suspicion was sufficient to justify torture: compelled to answer interrogatories, none were exempt from falling into their snares, whom they chose to condemn. A different mode from all judaical procedure ever before instituted in the world, invested them with power to find victims, and constitute crimes. The horrible edicts of Frederic IId. and of St. Lewis, that hater of heretics, issued at the instigation of Rome, make the blood run cold. AN. 1229. That monarchs could so easily devote to racks, gibbets, and tortures of every kind, the most inoffensive of their subjects, merely under a charge of heresy, and to gratify the tyranny of Rome and her savage partisans, is astonishing. The atrocious barbarities of Conrad of Marpurg, one of the first inquisitors in Germany, are on record; till he fell himself a victim to the horrors he excited. The same was the case with Pierre de Castelnau, the pontifical legate and inquisitor in France, whom the enraged populace murdered, revolting at his merciless massacres. By these and their fellows, the insolent Pontiff expected to trample on the prostrate world, and to root out every tongue that muttered against his blasphemies, tyranny, and hypocrisy; and could an arm of flesh prevail, his triumphs had been complete; for more innocent blood was now shed by the hand of these conspirators against the truth, than perhaps had ever flowed under the cruellest

of the pagan emperors: but power and craft are alike in vain against the Lord. When God will work, none shall let it.

AN. 1223. The Franciscans were the worthy associates with their black brethren in this spiritual crusade for the extirpation of heresy. Francis of Assisi, an Italian, from a man of profligate manners, become a devotee, established the order which bears his name. Ignorant, fanatic, devout, zealous, devoted to Rome, his numerous followers embraced the rigid poverty he prescribed, and clothed with the most humiliating name of *little brethren*, or *minors*, united to bring down the mightiest monarchs and their kingdoms to the feet of the Roman pontiffs. These zealous partisans of St. Peter, the politic popes clothed with extraordinary prerogatives, to confess, to absolve, and be the medium of distributing those wondrous indulgences that covered the transgressor from all apprehension of punishment, for sins past, present, or to come. The bishops and secular clergy, with envy saw their choicest prerogatives sacrificed to these squalid mendicants, and all their jurisdiction superseded by these intruders into their several folds; whilst emperors and kings, as well as Pontiffs, employed them in all their important affairs, political and temporal, as well as ecclesiastical; finding them the most adroit negociators, as well as the most confidential envoys.

Had these orders cordially united with each other and among themselves, more dreadful had

been the state of the Christian world. Their numbers, fanaticism, obedience, devotion to Rome, activity, power, *influence*, could hardly have been withstood, and superstition and tyranny might have established their dominion for ever. But these sturdy beggars could neither agree with each other, nor among themselves. Jealousy for their order, claims of superior sanctity and pre-eminence, and the jarring interests, where two beggars met at the same door, raised a spirit of enmity not easily appeased by the pontiffs themselves. They loaded each other with the bitterest invectives, and the foulest accusations; and could not share contentedly the spoil they had extorted. They often treated all other orders, and the whole body of the clergy with sovereign contempt; pretending that the true method of salvation was peculiarly revealed to them and to their order only; and that they had an especial commission from God. They boasted of their superior intimacy with the Almighty, and the Virgin Mary, and all the saints in glory; and of consequence their especial interest in Heaven.

To vie with their brethren in excellence, the general of the Carmelite order produced a revelation, expressly given him by the Virgin Mary, that whoever departed this life, with the Carmelite *scapulary* on his shoulders, might go to Heaven's gate direct, and be admitted by St. Peter, and no questions asked. And this ridiculous story, even pontiffs, and those like Benedict XIV. of the more liberal cast, sanctioned and defended.

The austerities of their order divided the Franciscans among themselves. The original rule of absolute poverty had been dispensed with by the imperious Gregory IX. But the most *spiritual* bigots would not permit even a Pope to alter the constitutions of their founder, or receive the mitigation proposed, of a right to the *use* of things given them, whilst the *property* vested in St. Peter and his successors. They would be *absolute beggars* in spite of the Pope himself. These ridiculous contests between the *spiritual* and those of the *mitigated* rule, employed Pope after Pope to restrain and terminate them in vain.

An. 1226. A farrago of fanatical prophecies produced by one Joachim, of the rigid order of Franciscans, and commented upon by another *spiritual* father, named Gerhard, widened the domestic breach. The spiritual and austere embraced his book, called *the Everlasting Gospel*, proclaiming *the perfect age of the Holy Ghost*, now arrived under the ministry of St. Francis, who was the very angel St. John saw, Rev. xiv. 6; and his bare-footed followers were to be the distinguished ministers of this final dispensation of perfection. The University of Paris appeared exceedingly offended at these pretensions; and the literati taking up the quarrel, compelled Pope Alexander IV. though with much reluctance, to condemn the book; for he feared this might prejudice his mendicant satellites in the eyes of the world, and he wished nothing more than to maintain their reputation unsullied. An. 1255.

The disputes which the Popes in vain attempted to smother, between the *spiritual* Franciscans and their brethren, broke out afresh; and as the see of Rome had espoused the one party, the other spared not the head itself: and in a comment on the Revelations, Pierre de Olive, one of the most fanatical of the order, whilst he exalts St. Francis, as *entirely transformed into the person of Christ*, brands the papal see, as *the Whore of Babylon, and the Mother of harlots*. Olive being a man of most sanctimonious deportment, and revered by the multitude as a prophet sent from Heaven, gave great weight to the party of the rigid Franciscans. Different generals of the order, as they were more indulgent or austere, favoured each side alternately. In vain new attempts were formed by Popes to reduce the more *spiritual* to the *mitigated rule*; they refused to admit any mitigations, nor could the terrors of Boniface VIII. compel them to desist from the renunciation of all *right of use*, and to pride themselves in absolute beggary and poverty.

Under *Celestin V.* they hoped to have formed a separate order. As he was nearly as austere as themselves, he favoured their pretensions, and consented to erect them into a new order, under the name of *Celestin Hermits of St. Francis*. But this favour was of a short date; his successor annulled his acts, and suppressed the institution; and thus the *spirituals* had again to conflict with the Pope, and with their brethren.

The worldly-minded of the order, beggars as they were by profession, were strenuous for the *use* of the good things which they possessed, in whomsoever the Pope was pleased to vest *the property*. Having Boniface on their side, they goaded their more strait laced brethren with unrelenting severity; and, enraged at the insolence of any who dared resist his decisions, the Pope determined to subdue their obstinacy. A grievous persecution was stirred up against them through Italy, where they had greatly spread; and many of them fell victims to the bigotry of their brethren, under the horrible process of inquisitorial cruelty.

Nearly related to these were the *Fratricelli*, who, professing the most literal adherence to the rule of St. Francis, renounced both the *possession*, and *right of use* of all things, and begged in rags their daily bread from door to door. As they were persecuted by the Roman see, they retorted bitterly on Rome and its Pontiffs, and the contrast of their rags and poverty, with clerical magnificence, spoke a language that many highly respected.

From these sprung one branch of the sect called *Beghards*, who, though attached to St. Francis, were but the lay brethren of the Fratricelli. The particulars of each would lead me into minutiæ, beyond the bounds I have prescribed to myself. Suffice it only to observe, that by these, a spirit of opposition to papal wealth and tyranny was kept up; and strangely fanatic as were their

opinions and conduct, and bitter as their enmity was against heretics, they ultimately served to keep alive the conflict with abused power, and led men to examine the claims of the pontifical see.

I cannot quit the history of the Franciscans, without the mention of one who will be for ever dear to Englishmen. Roger Bacon, commonly called Friar Bacon, ranks above the greatest geniuses of that age: he displayed scientific attainments far beyond the ideas of the times in which he lived, and laid the foundations for the noble superstructure that a Boyle and a Newton afterwards erected. Deep in astronomy, chemistry, optics, and mathematics, as profound in philosophy and theology, he was condemned as having intercourse with the Devil; since no human faculties were supposed equal to his universal knowledge. And it must be owned, that Aquinas, St. Amour and Bonaventura, the other boasted scholars of the day, were, comparatively with him, children in understanding. Among the deep discoveries he made, was the composition of gunpowder: though probably his humanity engaged him to conceal the deadly invention, fearing its destructive effects to mankind.

This prodigy of learning had few who trod in his steps of experimental physics, or at all approached his excellence. The stagyrite was enthroned, and the scholastic theology dominant universally. The acute and learned disputant exhausted all the shafts of his quiver in Aristote-

lian subtilties, and frivolous contests, on matters of little utility to the interests of real science or mankind.

The learned works of morals and theology, in folio, multiplied abundantly, whilst religious knowledge and practice were equally debased. No man ventured, without danger, to suspect the grossest frauds of superstition, or to doubt the efficacy of relics, and the ceremonies of religion. The tyranny of Rome was submitted to with the most abject devotion; and every prerogative of the holy see defended with the most furious zeal; whilst the fundamental doctrines of the Bible were disregarded, and purity of heart and life was almost unknown; but the impious doctrine of human merit found the mightiest monkish support; and it was affirmed, that whoever chose it, might perform a more perfect obedience than God required, and lay up a store of works of supererogation, to enrich the treasury of the Church. The very sordid garb of a mendicant was a robe of righteousness.

An. 1215. The Pope, by his own authority, now claimed a right to establish articles of faith; and in the fourth Lateran council, published his decrees, which the assembled bishops were to hear and obey. Then, first the term *transubstantiation*, by his authority became established, and *auricular confession* universally imposed, mighty engines in the hands of sacerdotal jugglers. The absurd notions of propitiating God by self-inflicted punish-

ments, produced the *flagellantes*, who filled the air with shrieks, and covered their bodies with gore, in honor of God and his saints; and acquired no small measure of veneration by these severities. Indeed, the vogue into which this discipline came, occasioned such tumults and concourse, as compelled the Popes and Emperors to check by edicts these fanatic exercises.

The wretched mode in which morals were taught by the most admired writers, such as Thomas Aquinas and others, tended to divert the mind from attending to the acquisition of holy affections, and a conversation in Heaven. Endless definitions of virtues and vices, intermixed with the solution of curious and useless questions, displayed their own deep logical subtilties; and the ideas affixed to their virtues and vices, were so totally diverse from the real graces of the spirit, and the works of the flesh, as described in the Scriptures of truth, that it was impossible to discern any similitude between them.

Holiness and Charity consisted not in pure affections, and faith working by love in all its blessed influences; but in giving alms to the ragged fraternity of mendicants, building churches, endowing monasteries, and in perfect and unresisting obedience to all the dictates of the holy see. *Humility*, instead of a lowly sense of our unworthy selves and sinful services, now stood in a tattered garment, bound with a cord, and bare feet, begging from door to door, to accumulate a store of

merit for those who chose to purchase it. *Truth*, no longer respected the revealed word of prophets and apostles, but centered in quotations from the fathers, the decrees of Popes, the canons of councils, and the dogmas of the schools. *Justice* implied not the defence of the natural rights of mankind, but the tormenting and plundering every man called heretic, and who refused a blind submission to papal impositions. When the sources of morals were thus dried up, or diverted from the true channel, the conduct which would follow, grounded on these new definitions, may easily be conceived, and was awfully exemplified in the most atrocious crimes committed under the pretext of zeal, and the most abominable indulgences granted to the vilest of mankind.

Many complaints of the wickedness of the present age, and the corruptions of the church, are heard and believed; and never was there an age, wherein these complaints were not true; but I confess myself so partial to the present times, that I must avow my conviction, on comparing the principles generally admitted, and the practices approved, that I see none superior to our own. I am sure in ignorance and immorality, the past have far exceeded us. And we have only to read many of the writers of that day, to be convinced that infidelity and atheism bore an equal proportion with the progress of superstition. And to this the Aristotelian dialectics greatly contributed, which maintained the impious maxim, that what was *theologically false* might be *philosophically true*.

CHAPTER III.

ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT, DISPUTES, HERESIES, RITES AND CEREMONIES.

THIS was the meridian splendor of papal domination. Unresisting submission was paid to the pontifical decrees; the whole ecclesiastical corps was drilled to passive obedience; and even monarchs held a precarious sceptre, surrendering their kingdoms as voluntary fiefs, and becoming creatures of the holy see. We have seen how far the pontifical pretensions extended, and the success attending them. The stoutest trembled before the papal anathemas, and the most stubborn was obliged to yield to the stern obstinacy of persevering ambition.

The clouds of locusts that rose from the bottomless pit, blackened the face of the sun. Their armies, marshalled under the generals of different *orders*, fought the battles of the see of Rome. The clergy, sufficiently corrupt before, proceeded in luxury according to their affluence; and the new hosts of monks contributed to seize the fruits of industry, to support the vices of beggary; whilst he that departed from evil, and refused to be the dupe of superstition, and the prey of sacerdotal rapine, was sure to be marked as a heretic, and devoted to destruction. That heretics abounded,

in the eye of the church at least, is evident from the methods invented to suppress them throughout the Christian world, and the violent means used to remedy the violence of the distemper. But of those who bore the name of heretic, the characters were wonderfully different. In one thing they generally concurred—"in rejecting the monstrous system of superstitions established; and in declaiming against the wealth, tyranny, and abuses of the Pope and his clergy." With various intermediate shades, the heretics seem to be of two sorts; *men of genuine piety and religion*, who, taking the word of God for their rule of life, adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, by a conversation becoming godliness. These treated with contempt the self-instituted rules of monastic superstition, and all the idle and useless ceremonials of religion, endeavouring to worship God in spirit and in truth. They formed congregations without the pageantry of devotion, and appointed their ministers for their piety, not their scientific attainments, or devotedness to Rome. But there were *others said to be of a different stamp*, who, under affectation of liberty and emancipation from all restraint, indulged opinions as fanatical and adverse to the purity of the Gospel, as their lives were a disgrace to the name of Christian. These went under a variety of denominations; and some carried their errors to a more dangerous and desperate extreme than others. Some of the *mystic sect* were contemplative, and placed perfection in abstractedness from the world, silent meditation, and declined all ordinances, supposing

devotion was wholly internal; others pretended to the eradication of every passion, and professing superiority to temptation, lived together, men and women promiscuously, going naked and sleeping together, as they affirmed, with the most perfect purity; whilst others indulged in every excess of appetite, and taught that the divine nature within them received no contamination from the gratifications of the flesh—not a few renouncing all pretence to religion, and denying the being and attributes of God, as well as revelation, lived as they list, and ridiculed the impositions which they so easily detected.

There were also many more said to be *highly* enthusiastic, who imitated all the practices of the mendicants, and with a still more squalid dress if possible, and maniacal wildness, roamed about the world and lived upon alms. These were all persecuted by the inquisitors with unrelenting cruelty, under the name of Albigenses, Turlupins, Beghards, Brethren of the Free Spirit, Cathari, Petrobrusians, Apostolics, and other appellations, which enmity or contempt had fixed upon them; and many of these expired in torment with the most sedate solemnity, and the most resigned devotion, and some with the most triumphant delight. Whilst their enemies endeavoured to exaggerate their crimes, they were often compelled to bear a reluctant testimony to their exemplary virtue; but that they might diminish the lustre of their character, the dominican inquisitor, Neider, asserted, that among other mighty influences of the Devil upon them, he preserved them from incontinence, by *infrigidating* their constitution.

I shall not enumerate the persons made famous by suffering, whether for the truth, as it is in Jesus, or the errors mixed with it; suffice it to observe, that whatever was the crime charged, the real cause was revolt from papal tyranny and jurisdiction; submitting to which, all the rest had been easily venial.

The grand breach between the Greek and Roman Church was wide as ever, in spite of all attempts of the Roman prelate to reduce all to the unity of obedience to St. Peter. Treaty upon treaty was made and broken; when the politics of the day required the Grecian Emperors to court the Roman Pontiff's help, they pretended to yield a little, but they had scarce returned home from embassies and councils, ere the controversy was renewed, with inveteracy greater than ever.

The dispute about the eucharist was not yet closed by the Pope's adopting the word *transubstantiation*; many submitted to acknowledge *a real presence*, without admitting a change of the symbols; and a subtle Aristotelian doctor of the Sarbonne, disputed with eclat for the modification of *consubstantiation*.

The rites and ceremonies before accumulating, continued to receive abundant additions. The WAFER GOD required a new pageantry of devotion to attend his shrine; the richest metals and jewels adorned the receptacle; the wax-tapers burned unextinguished before it; and all the parade of bowing, kneeling, and fine clothes, attracted the veneration of the vulgar, and exalted the glory of the minister, who could make the god he devoured, and reproduce him at pleasure.

A fanatical devotee at Liege, produced a revelation from Heaven for the institution of a new and peculiar festival *to the holy sacrament of the real presence.* She said that she no sooner began to pray to God and his saints, than the full moon shone upon her with a remarkable spot upon it; this the spirit informed her was a defect in the Church, which the moon represented, and could only be removed by this festival. The bishop of Liege hastened directly to brush off the spot from the moon, by observing the festival, and Urban VI. confirmed it by a solemn edict. AN. 1264.

At this time *the religious* began the scenic representations, called *Mysteries*, of which the vulgar, great and small, were so fond; and these tended farther to render ludicrous every thing sacred, like the *festival* of fools and *hymns* to the ass. Probably these were an invention of the mendicants, who affecting to instruct the populace by amusing them, introduced this sacred puppet-shew. The persons of the drama were sometimes real, sometimes allegorical: among these the principal were God Almighty, the Devil, Jesus Christ, Heresy, the Virgin Mary, and a variety of other respectable personages from Heaven and Hell, besides some that could be found in neither the world above or below. But every thing was sanctified that was designed for the honor of holy church, and to mark more strongly reverence for the monkish fraternity, or detestation of heretics. These godly representations particularly adorned the greatest festivals, and added to their pomp and majesty.

Another invention, worthy the great Boniface VIII. its author, closed the present century, *the celebration of the jubilee year*; but that it might not appear a modern trick, the garb of antiquity was cast over it, and pretended evidence produced of its being the practice of ages past. As credulity was prepared to receive the grossest assertions of Rome, and a rich harvest could be gathered from the assembly of pilgrims, a proclamation was made of the wonderous benefits to be reaped from visiting the Church of St. Peter and its relics, every centenary year. Full remission of sins, and showers of indulgencies, drew the fanatic world to the seat of holiness, to obtain these inestimable blessings, and to witness the glory, and receive the benediction of the vicegerent of God upon earth.

Bull upon bull contained the grossest contradictions respecting the institution, and the time of its celebration. The first essay was so gainful, that a hundred years was thought by the successors of Boniface too long to wait, so they reduced the term to fifty, and then to five and twenty years, for the benefit of all good Christians, who might be deprived of the transcendent advantages of the festival, by not being so fortunate as to live more than a hundred years. The disorders and devotion, the debaucheries, and liberal indulgencies of the pilgrims, may well be supposed from such assemblages, if the records of the times had not informed us.

Such a Church could not well fail to be marked by all who read the Scripture, as *the Mother of all abominations.*

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE SPIRITUAL CHURCH OF CHRIST.

THE Church of the living God began to rise more eminent to observation by the papal fires kindled around her. From the vallies of the Alps, where a holy seed had been preserved, they had now not only spread into the southern provinces of France, where persecution was most bloody, but into Germany and Italy. George Morel affirms, that those of the Waldensian confession, in *1260*, amounted to 800,000 persons.

The general name given them in Germany, was *Beghards*, said to be derived from the earnestness of their prayers, and their fervour in religious duties. The translator of Mosheim, to whom with his principal I have many obligations, is pleased to resemble these to the *Methodists*, so called, of our nation, whom he brands as a *fanatical set of men*; and I am disposed to think there was a real and strong resemblance between the Methodists of this day, and the Beghards of the thirteenth century, as there must be between all men who profess to follow wholly the divine revelation, and to be led by the same spirit of Jesus; but I am at a loss to know whence a life of diligent prayer and deep seriousness in religion, should charac-

terise a fanatic sect. I rather think that all good men, in all ages, exactly resembled each other in temper and spirit, and, living by faith, produced the same fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God. That the Beghards, many of them at least, were persons of this description, we can hardly doubt, when we have the witness of their enemies to the purity of their conduct in many instances, as we have assured evidence of the patience and fortitude with which they suffered for the truths which they maintained.

That many in that day broached wild and unscriptural opinions, and acted wholly unsuitably to the purity of the Gospel, we need not dispute: where the numbers of the discontented were great, and the abuses they saw so glaring, it could hardly be otherwise. But we may venture confidently to assert, that none of the miserable sufferers, in real crime and every abomination, were worse men than their inquisitorial murderers; nay, compared with these, the worst of the most fanatical sect was an angel of light.

It is impossible to reflect without wonder, considering the means employed to root out what was then called heresy, how it was preserved in the fires; when the power of monarchs, combined with papal authority, was seconded by all the craft and cruelty of inquisitors, and the whole mendicant tribe. A blessed body, however, though like the gleaning grapes of the vineyard when the vintage is done, remained as a sacred seed, and continued

to strike root, though watered with blood. Neither the terrors of suffering, nor the wild vagaries of the enthusiasts, prevented the faithful from holding fast what they had, that none should take their crown; but they had yet to struggle up hill for ages to come, scattered, depressed, persecuted, striving against the same strong arm of power, and the wiles of monkery, till the days of reformation.

In the East, the Nestorian zeal and labours had not failed, but the light had become dim, and the churches once numerous in Asia, were reduced to a few by the pagan and Mahomedan ravagers: still I doubt not some faithful men were found; and in the West, among all the nations professing Christianity, God had his secret ones, though small, and of no reputation. The leaven was yet fermenting, and the lump not wholly unleavened.

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